

# climber

MAY 2015

## PEMBROKE'S BOSHERSTON HEAD

SUBLIME  
SEA CLIFF TRAD

### DESTINATION

**GREAT WOLFREY**  
YORKSHIRE MOORLAND GRIT

**GERMANY'S  
ETTRINGEN**  
BRILLIANT BASALT CLIMBING

### INTERVIEW

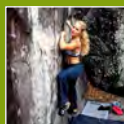
**ETHAN WALKER**  
RISING ROCK STAR

### GEAR REVIEW

**FABRIC  
TECHNOLOGY**



BEST WINTER  
SEASON FOR  
YEARS



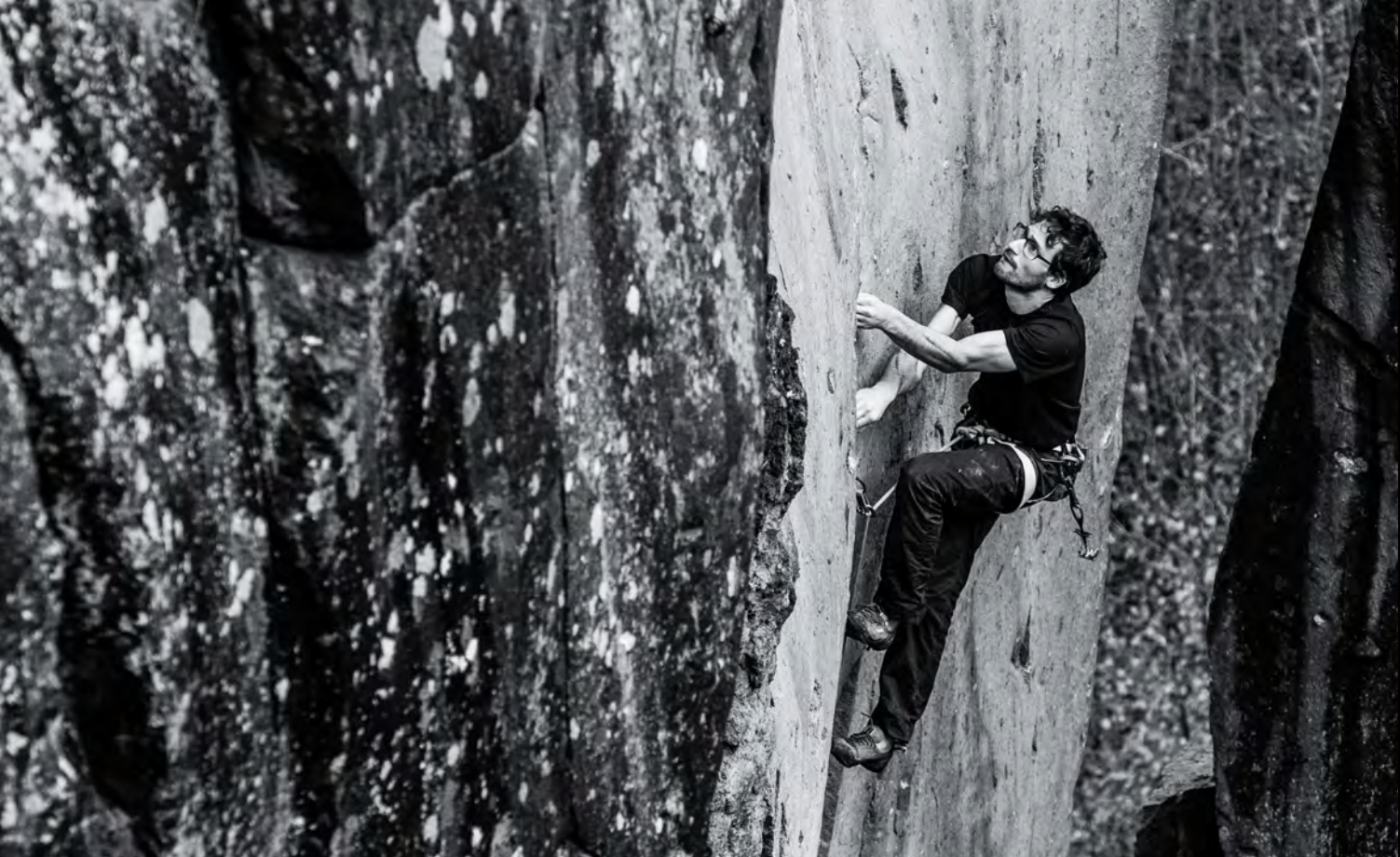
URBAN CLIMBER:  
THE ART OF  
ROUTE SETTING



SCOTTISH  
BOULDERING AT  
DUMBARTON







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# A Big Thanks

As I sit down and write this it brought me back to catching a glimpse of the recent partial eclipse of the sun; slightly obscured by clouds it was still a great sight and an event that doesn't come around often. I remember the last major eclipse back in 1999 when I was fortunate enough to be out in the Peak soloing around at Higgat Tor at the same time.

This brings me to the point I wish to make and it's all about rare things; in this instance a person; Ian Smith. As you know Ian is the Assistant Editor of *Climber* and after 28 years in the business, starting with *High* magazine, he's decided it's now the moment for a well-earned break and take retirement.

I've been lucky enough to know Ian for many years as a colleague but, more importantly, a friend. From when our paths first crossed he encouraged me to become a climbing photographer and has offered encouragement and advice along the way over the years. Indeed without Ian coming on board three years ago, I doubt I would have taken on the magazine. Over the years *Climber* has continued to evolve and grow from strength to strength and Ian steps back with the magazine in very good shape both in print, digitally and on the web.

Ian will still continue to support *Climber* magazine so we haven't seen the last of him just yet but I'd like to say a huge thank you to him and wish him a fulfilling retirement. Cheers Ian.

Be safe

David

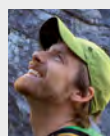


## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



### Sam Brown

Sam was born into a climbing family and since the age of three has always been at the crag and has ticked many UK classics up to E8 and F8a. After life-changing circumstances he decided the best thing he could do would be to leave the UK and he got in his van with no real plan other than to climb.



### John Hutchinson

John is originally from the Scottish Borders but has lived in Glasgow for 10 years since he moved west to study at Glasgow University. When forced to work he can be found either selling outdoor kit in Graham Tiso Ltd or manning reception at The Climbing Academy, Glasgow.



### Lucy Creamer

Lucy is widely regarded as Britain's finest woman climber. Her versatility is amazing and she was the first to climb E8 trad, F8b+ on sport, climbed M9 on ice and was British Champion in both lead and bouldering competitions. However, in recent years she suffered some serious injuries and has only recently been able to climb again, but now seems to be back to close to her best.



### Mike Hutton

Mike's passion for photography began when he embarked on a 4,000 mile solo cycle trip from Gibraltar to North Cape back in 2001. Since then he has focused on taking photographs of climbers in some of the most beautiful places in the world.

After turning professional Mike has acquired over 1,000 photo credits to his name and he currently divides his time between photography, writing and lecturing. Mike's work can be viewed at [www.mikehuttonphotography.com](http://www.mikehuttonphotography.com)

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Front Cover: Lucy Ham feeling the exposure on *Poltergeist* (HVS 5a) on the South Face of Bosherton Head, Pembroke. Photo: David Simmonite



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## 2014/15: The Best Winter Season for Years?

A round-up of hardest new routes and repeats in North Wales and Scotland **by Keith Sharples**

Below: Pete Harrison on *Heidbanger* (VIII,8) on The Ben.  
Photo: Tom Livingstone

Bottom: Tom Livingstone climbing *Cracking Up* (IX,9) on Clogwyn Du. Photo: Will Hardy

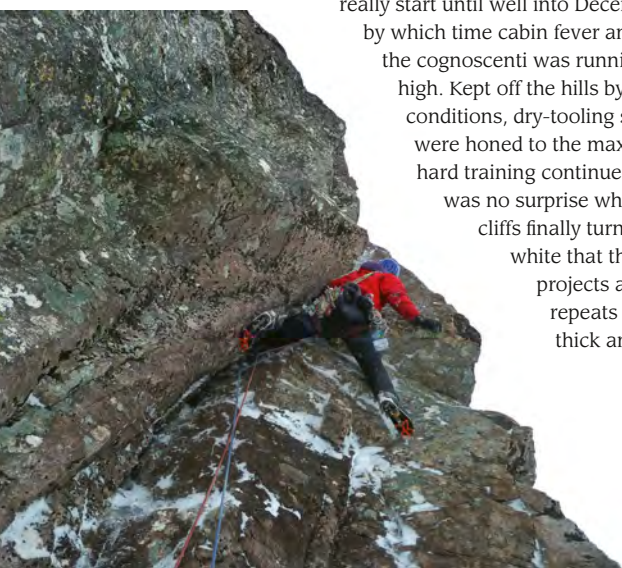
As the 2014/15 winter season slips away it's clear from the amazing first ascents and early/rare repeats of hard routes that have been done that it has been one of the best seasons for years. Nevertheless, conditions have been both challenging and changeable and the action didn't really start until well into December by which time cabin fever amongst the cognoscenti was running high. Kept off the hills by poor conditions, dry-tooling skills were honed to the max and hard training continued so it was no surprise when the cliffs finally turned white that the hard projects and repeats fell thick and fast.

It's been an outstanding year for new routes; the second ever XII,12 was done as well as numerous other routes across the grade spectrum. The first of the harder new mixed routes went to Martin Moran and Robin Thomas when they did *Boggled* (VIII,8) on Beinn Eighe in mid-December. By late December the action switched to North Wales when Pete Harrison went *Wide Asleep* (X,9) at Clogwyn Du and he followed this with *The Charlatan* (IX,9) in January. Reflecting on his routes, Harrison believes *Wide Asleep* to be the boldest as well as one of the most physical routes he's ever done. Impressively, Harrison completed *Wide Asleep* both ground-up and on-sight – one of the few first ascents of a grade X to be climbed on-sight. *The Charlatan* (IX,9) is equally good according to Harrison who described it as a "mountaineering-classic."

Further north, Scottish winter history was about to have another chapter added. Andy Inglis and Iain Small added *Teufel Grooves* (IX,9) to The Ben but it was Greg Boswell, climbing with Guy

Robertson, who dominated the new route scene when he blasted not one but three new grade Xs in a little over a fortnight. Starting with *The Greatest Show on Earth* (X,10) on Cul Mor they followed with *Range War (Winter Variations)* (X,10) on Creag an Dubh Loch and then *Messiah* (X,10) on Beinn Bhan on which Guy Robertson also led one of the grade X pitches.

Boswell, however, had even bigger plans and his next effort, *Banana Wall* (XII,12), surpassed all his previous routes by a clear margin. Climbing a massively overhanging wall in Coire an Lochain, *Banana Wall* is only the second ever route of that grade to be done in Scotland after Anubis, Dave MacLeod's 2010 route on The Ben. Boswell had been eyeing up *Banana Wall* for some time and had even tied-in previously but had bailed out and climbed down. Finally, he committed to the lead on February 25th getting very high on his first attempt before taking a huge fall. Despite still feeling tired from his previous go, Boswell's second attempt was successful although not without all the usual angst of a super hard lead. Commenting after his ascent Greg believes that *Banana Wall* is much harder than his other routes that he's done this season as the gear is hard to find and place and that the climbing is both very strenuous and technical. Believing that *Banana Wall* would merit M11, Greg feels that it's a least a grade or two harder than *The Hurting* and *Don't Die of Ignorance* hence his XII,12 grade. Understandably, Greg is delighted with his winter season. He told *Climber*: "I made a list at the start of the season of a handful of routes, and apart from one, I have ticked off everything I wanted to do and more. There are two main highlights for me. Firstly, making the first winter ascent of *Range War* (X,10) in the Dubh Loch, as this is a route I have been longing to try for a few seasons now and the fact that it was such an awesome route in such an adventurous location made it all the better.





# CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY



Greg Boswell on *Banana Wall* (XII,12) in Coire an Lochain. Photo: Masa Sakano

Second, was definitely climbing *Banana Wall* (XII,12) in the Cairngorms. These routes will stay in my mind for a long time and it was awesome to finally get them both done, along with all the other routes I've done this season, it will be hard to top."

On the repeat front, a plethora of hard and rarely repeated routes were quickly snatched as they came into good condition – in some cases the first time for years. The ice on The Ben was particularly good and many teams did routes like *Mega Route X* (V,6), *The Shroud* (VI,6), *Gemini* (VI,6) and *The Shield Direct* (VII,7) for the first time in years reporting that the ice was excellent and the climbing more like a Canadian or French experience. The stormy westerlies that raked across the country for much of the winter meant that sheltered crags like Beinn Bhan were attractive objectives. In addition to the first ascent of *Messiah*, *Godzilla* (IX,9) was repeated by Andy Inglis, Iain Small and Murdoch Jamieson shortly before Small and Jamieson did the second ascent of *God Delusion* (IX,9). Over on Beinn Eighe, *Boggled* (VIII,8) and *Pale Rider* (VIII,9) saw their second ascents by Uisdean Hawthorn and Murdoch Jamieson and Andy Inglis and Will Sim respectively.

Also getting firmly in amongst the action was Tom Livingstone. Resident in North Wales and a frequent partner-in-crime to Paul Harrison, Tom has had an excellent year repeating numerous test-pieces often climbing them on-sight. Having repeated *Centurion* (VIII,8) with Dave Almond, Tom did the third ascent of *Heidbanger* (VIII,8) also on The Ben with Pete Harrison before repeating *Cracking Up* (IX,9) and *The Charlatan* (IX,9) both on Clogwyn Du and *The Secret* (IX,9) on The Ben (*The Secret* is now graded VIII,8 not IX,9 as originally thought/widely published). Given that Tom has been active both in both Wales and Scotland we asked him if there were any differences between the Welsh and Scottish 'experience' and which of the routes he'd done were special. ►

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# HEADLINES

Not surprisingly he confirmed that the conditions in Wales are “a lot more fickle” and “the Welsh walk-ins are significantly shorter than in Scotland.” Of the routes Tom did: “*Cracking Up* (IX,9) was a really enjoyable route; the climbing is wild and it really made me fight. I blew the on-sight by falling metres from the top, but managed to climb it ground-up, second go. *Centurion* (VIII,8) felt special too, again a big reputation and I’d looked at the line for several years. The second pitch was the highlight, brilliant climbing in an atmospheric position.”

Dave Almond also had an excellent winter repeating *The Secret* on The Ben and then *The Charlatan* and *Eraserhead* (VIII,8) on Clogwyn Du having done the first ascent of *Ice One H* (VIII,8) at Clogwyn y Ddysgl with Pete Harrison. However, the biggest/high profile repeat of the season went to Ines Papert when she repeated Dave MacLeod’s *The Hurting* (XI,11) in the eye of a true Scottish storm. Papert, on her third visit to Scotland, took two days to repeat *The Hurting* being defeated by poor conditions on her first day. As with Boswell on *Banana Wall*, Papert has confirmed that getting the gear in was crucial. Her ascent is the hardest yet achieved by a women on a Scottish winter route. ■

Greg Boswell climbing *Range War (Winter Variations)* (X,10) on Creag an Dubh Loch.

Photo: Guy Robertson



## Climbing Works International Festival 2015

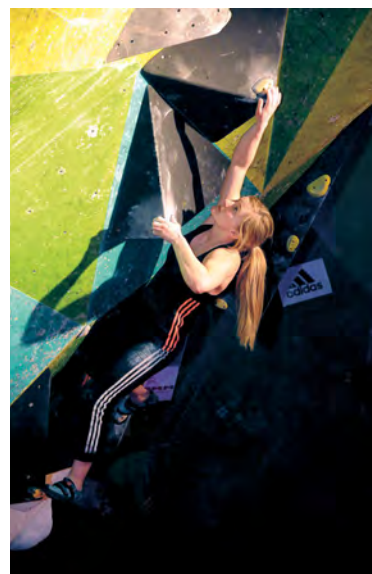
Photos by Ian Smith

Around 350 competitors from across the globe converged on The Climbing Works in Sheffield recently for the Ninth International Festival; a festival that saw two of the world’s best boulderers – Shauna Coxsey and Alex Megos taking the two titles. In Shauna’s case, this was her fourth straight win at the CWIF. The finals on Sunday comprised of four problems apiece for the men and the women and these had been set by Percy Bishton and the setting crew. Alex Megos proved unstoppable as he returned a perfect scorecard; four tops in four attempts. Dave Barrans fought like a beast to gain four tops in 10 attempts and so achieved a well-deserved second place edging out Thomas Caleyron last year’s winner who scored three tops in three goes but failed to make any impression on the fourth bloc. For a while it looked as though Shauna Coxsey was going to replicate the form of Alex Megos and pull four tops in four goes. However, to everyone’s



Winner, Shauna Coxsey on the fourth problem.

France's Thomas Caleyron who finished third.





amazement and her amusement, Shauna took two attempts to succeed on the heinous volumes that the setters had constructed for problem number three. Eventually, Clementine Kaiser placed second with local, Diane Merrick, taking third place. The medal ceremony was, in true CWIF style, a totally different affair to normal. Volumes – hanging from the ceiling – were duly lowered and the medal winners faced their final hurdle, that of mounting their respective volumes, failure, of course, meaning abject humility in front of the packed house. The prizes were awarded by none other than Elvis Prellison (aka John Ellison, founder of the charity Climbers Against Cancer, one of the charities to benefit from donations collected over the weekend) which included suitably coloured (gold, silver, bronze) ‘quiff’-shaped wigs. ■



Dave Barrans, on his way to a fine second place, tackling the third problem in the final.

Diane Merrick completing the final problem giving her a podium finish.



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## Long-time UK resident climbs major new route on Troll Wall in winter

Winter climbing on Trollveggen, Norway's notorious Troll Wall, has a long history, dating back to March 1974 when a strong Polish team of Marek Kesicki, Ryszard Kowalewski, Voytek Kurtyka and Tadeusz Piotrowski made the first winter ascent via the *French Route*. However, new routes climbed in the cold season have been rare. From the 23rd January to 9th February this year, Poles, Marek Raganowicz and Marcin Tomaszewski climbed new ground up the central part of the wall to complete *Katharsis*, c1,150m, VI, A4 M7. This is the third truly major big wall route established by the pair in the last three years. Raganowicz, in his

early 50s, has been a UK resident for 11 years, based in Inverness and working off-shore with the access company CAN. His more than 30 years' climbing experience involves solo ascents of half a dozen big wall routes on El Capitan. Tomaszewski remains in Poland, from where he operates a rope access company.

The pair spent four days carrying loads to a camp at the base of the wall and then, without initially fixing any rope, set off in capsule style. They climbed no more than two pitches a day, made two portaledge camps, the first at the top of pitch 8, the second at the end of pitch 14, and reached the summit in a total of 27 pitches.

On the 7th and 8th February they were stuck fast for two days sitting out hurricane Ole, but on the 9th climbed four pitches of M5 to the top before rappelling the route. The pair began with the first two pitches of the 1967 *French Route* (Boussard- Brunet-Cordier-Deck-Frehel) and then forced a direct line between the 1997 *Russian Route* (Koshelenko-Ruchkin) and *Arch Wall* (Drummond- Drummond, 1972). Where these two routes cross at a large ledge, the Poles climbed direct via an A4 crack to the big terrace below the overhanging section, which is avoided on the left by the *French Route*, and on the right by the *Russian*. The Poles continued direct. Above the roofs they met the *French Route* again at the point where it pendulums from the left. From there they followed the *French Route* – the logical line – to the summit.

Raganowicz and Tomaszewski found the ascent a huge challenge for a two-man team and were pleased to complete the wall via a fine, natural and logical line, which required no excessive drilling (nine rivets on a total of three pitches where the rock was completely blank and belay bolts on approximately 11 stances). "Winter conditions made this climb hard," noted Raganowicz, "with fast changing temperatures filling the cracks with ice. Placements were poor on all A3/A4 sections."

*Katharsis* is the first new route on the face to be put up in winter by a two-man team. It is also likely only the second new winter route where the climbers did not fix from the ground before committing to the wall. Climbing there in winter, where the temperature fluctuates dramatically, produces either totally frozen or totally wet bivouac gear and equipment. Climbing as a trio the third man can dry gear during the day, while the remaining two progress the route. Fixing from the ground allows climbers to dry gear in base camp.



Tomaszewski jumarung high on the wall.





The two Poles chose neither option and found the worst part of the climb to be the bivouacs, which were 'simply horrible'.

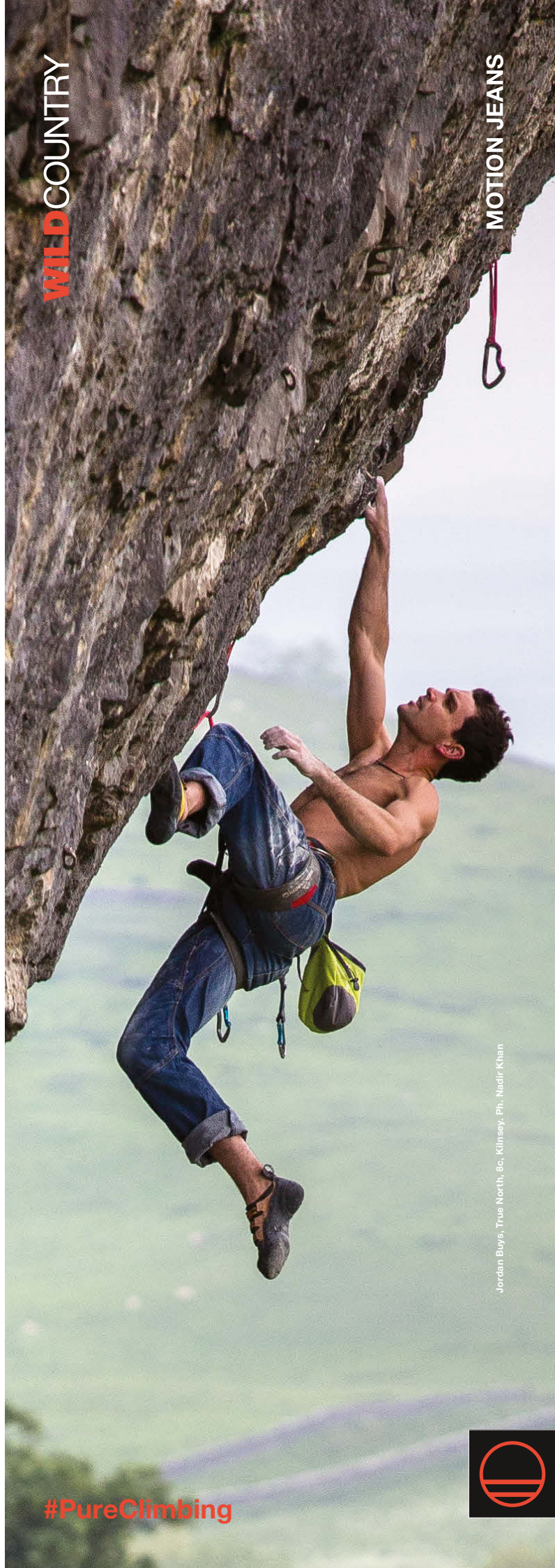
Theirs was only the fourth new route climbed on the Troll Wall in winter, the first achieved by the British climber and Alpinist Choe Brooks. From the 6th to 19th March 1982, Brooks, with a legendary trio of top Norwegian climbers, Hans Christian Doeseth, and the brothers Havard and Sgurr Nesheim, put up *Trollkjerring*, a route to which the following summer Doeseth would return for a free ascent. From the 7th to 17th February 1986, Aslak Astrop, Oystein Bardsnes, Bernt Pedersen and Oyvind Vadla climbed the wonderfully named *Death to all Pretty Young Vikings* (A4 and loose in parts; the team didn't fix before embarking on the climb). Both these routes lie on the shorter, far right side of the wall and can be completed in 18-22 pitches. From the 3rd to 21st February 2002, a six-man Russian team of Vladimir Arkhipov, Sergey Cherezov, Eugeny Dmitrienko, Oleg Khvostenko, Anton Pugovkin and Pavel Zakharov, from the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, climbed the 1,200m *Krasnoyarsk Route* at VI, 5.10, A4+. This is a true direttissima up the centre of the wall, forcing a line between the 1965 *Norwegian* and 1967 *French Routes*, having some common ground with *Arch Wall* at around two-thirds height, and then when the latter moves left, pursuing a direct line up the headwall to the summit. At the time it was considered the hardest aid route on the wall. However, the Krasnoyarsks fixed most of the route, returning to the valley each night (one pair led more or less throughout, while the remaining four jumared the fixed lines with gear). Huge rockfalls have decimated the wall during the last decade and that has limited activity on the central, highest part of the face; climbing there in winter now has a certain logic. ■



- ▲ The Troll Wall with the line of the new Polish route, *Katharsis*.
- ◀ Grim weather on the Troll Wall during the ascent of *Katharsis*.

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### Wild Country Dynamic Jacket men's & women's RRP: £85/£90 Torque Pants men's & women's RRP: £70

After a very successful first season the Wild Country apparel line has grown. They've expanded their Technical Range combining the best materials to make stand-out pieces. Key new lines include: the Wild Country Dynamic jacket, the definition of essential kit, this trim zip-up leads the new technical range and delivers amazing mobility with unrestricted arm-lift. A true climbing jacket it is perfect either tucked into a harness on awkward pitches, or worn loose on fridge-hugging boulders in Font.

Features: Bluesign certified, Recycled

Silverised liner, DWR outer, hood (women's) 250g. Also, Wild Country Torque Pants are super-tough nylon canvas pants built for sending. Rugged, yet flexible they are perfect for 3D climbing: tufa wrestling, kneebars, cracks and walls - anything that would shred lighter pants. Features: Bluesign certified, Durastretch material, Y cut crotch, pre-formed knees, 470g. Superb additions to their popular range, this is true climbing clothing with a functional edge and a fashionable streak.



### Berghaus VapourLight HyperTherm Hoody RRP: £150

New from Berghaus is the VapourLight HyperTherm Hoody, featuring award winning synthetic Hydroloft insulation, offering effective warmth even when wet. Worn one way, the HyperTherm has a very wind and water resistant Berghaus AF face fabric; reversed, the face allows more airflow through the jacket, providing an ideal balance of insulation and breathability, whether working hard or static. At only 221g for a men's size large (185g for a women's 12), the HyperTherm Hoody is an excellent option for summer insulation. Features include a snug hood, two zipped handwarmer pockets and a stuff sac.



### Edelrid Leaf

RRP: £65

The Leaf weighs in at just 260g and uses a laminate construction that allows for a high load bearing potential. The interior of the waist belt and leg loops retains an un-laminated open mesh structure, for enhanced breathability. The harness features two ice screw clips and four asymmetric gear loops - the two rear loops have been lowered so that your rack remains fully accessible when climbing with a pack and utilises a softer construction to reduce pressure points when sitting or hanging. Though labelled as a fixed leg loop harness, sliding buckles actually allow for movement between 10 and 20mm. To improve safety there's also a new textile abrasion protector. Red fibres become visible once significant wear occurs, this acts as a visual cue to remind the user that they should consider replacing their harness.



### Montane Prism Sleeping Bag RRP: £175

Created for rough and tough conditions, Montane's Prism Sleeping Bag features 160g PrimaLoft Silver ECO insulation for superb warmth to weight ratio. PrimaLoft Silver ECO is an ultra-fine microfibre that mimics the structure of goose down and is made from 70% recycled fibers. It is breathable, water repellent, highly compressible, lightweight, warm when wet and dries very quickly. Montane's new Prism Sleeping bag has been conceived for expeditions where high levels of moisture are expected, durability is needed and consistency of function is demanded. As PrimaLoft is highly resistant to moisture, it maintains its insulation even when wet. The Prism Sleeping Bag weighs 1,170g and is available in colourways Black/Kiwi and Olive.





## DMM Pivot

RRP: £30

Versatile, functional and innovative, the new DMM Pivot is a modern belay device that caters for modern belaying techniques with modern ropes. The head turner is the innovative pivot – this patent pending solution shifts the lever arrangement to allow controlled and easily initiated lowering when used in guide/direct mode. Once the top is reached, the Pivot will be a trustworthy abseil partner for the return to the base. Perfect for Alpine, winter and multi-pitch trad. All of these features are wrapped up in a package weighing only 72g; classic DMM innovation.

## Evolv Luchador RRP: £105

New to the technical all-around category is the Luchador. It is built off a slightly cambered last with a semi-asymmetrical toe profile that allows for great control on small edges. Its new non-shifting tongue system offers exceptional comfort and also padding along the outside of the shoe when stuffed into cracks. The Luchador is available in Velcro and Lace closures and features a leather foot bed and microfibre lining which provides the comfort and the tensioned rand gives power through the toes. All this means that the Luchador should be the all-rounder's dream shoe.



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## Grivel Mega K6G RRP: £12

This twin gate karabiner is Grivel's attempt to produce the definitive safe locking karabiner. It resolves the issue of locking karabiners accidentally working their way undone or not being locked in the first place. You can't deny that it is super safe. The opposing gates are spring loaded to always snap shut so it is always locked. The next plus is that because these gates replace the traditional screwgate you can't run a rope over it to unlock it either. So far so good. The simplicity of the mechanism means it doesn't get stuck nearly as readily by ice or grit which is good news too.

But, and it's a big but, it's quite fiddly to use. You will quickly grasp the dexterity needed to apply simultaneous pressure on both gates to open, but it might never feel as easy as you'd like. Over time you will become accustomed to the mechanism but you should think for a moment about what you want to use an HMS for. It is true that the Mega K6G doesn't freeze like other screwgates, but I'm guessing that you may

not wish to use this karabiner in winter as you'll be wearing gloves. With thin Alpine gloves on, using this karabiner is tricky but I just about managed to operate it with a single hand. With a slightly thicker pair of winter gloves I tended to need the dexterity of both hands to open the gate, which is a concern. With a durable pair of armoured ice climbing gloves it's even trickier. And let's remember that when it matters the most, when it's blowing a hoolie, when your hands are cold and you perhaps you can't even see the karabiner round the back of your harness... well, I think you get my point. So winter is out and that's a shame because I like to buy gear that I know fits all situations.

So now that's out of the way let's focus on when you might want to use it. It's well-suited to sport climbing and I've used it whilst trad climbing over the autumn too. An anti rotation feature would have been a nice addition but is not crucial. When building an anchor at Froggatt I found it



easily accommodated two clove hitches with my 10mm single rope. When belaying it feels robust and at 80g has a nice weight to it but I would expect a modern krab to be a little lighter. Feel free to compare the weight to whatever your own HMS of choice is. I generally carry around a screwgate which is only three grams heavier, but squeezes on a third hitch. I'll admit that my 'old faithful' cost a few quid more but I can use it in winter. It's design is eye catching, I'll give it that, and the design is innovative, and so I want to like this karabiner a little more than I actually do.

Conclusions – this must be the safest locking karabiner on the market and Grivel should be proud of that. But, by solving one problem they have created another. For me, personally, it initially felt a little over engineered and a tad fiddly, but over time I got used to it. It isn't good for all seasons but if, like many, the thought of winter climbing is a big turn off that shouldn't be a concern. ■

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# New British route in the Mont Blanc range



▲ Matt Helliker links another mixed section into an icy corner on *Mastabas*.  
Photo: Jon Bracey

Jon Bracey enjoying taking advantage of the morning warmth as he enters the off-width on pitch 1 of *Mastabas*. Photo: Matt Helliker ►

On the 18th February British Alpinists Matt Helliker and Jon Bracey added what is thought to be a new mixed route to the North East Face of the Pyramid du Tacul in the Mont Blanc Massif. The ephemeral route starts in the area of the summer rock route *Le ronfleur paradoxal* for a pitch then follows a natural winter line to join the East Ridge to the summit. After watching the conditions build throughout January on the face, the Alpinists approached from the Aiguille du Midi on ski on 18th February. The route climbs thin icy runnels linked by hard steep mixed sections, giving excellent sustained climbing. They descended off the back in three abseils to the glacier then skied the Vallee Blanche to Chamonix. With its easy ski access, this route should give another option to some of the other popular over crowded routes in the area when in winter condition. They have called the route *Mastabas* (M7, 250m). ■



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## Bouldering, Coaching and Conclusions



Whilst not truly based on a climbing piece of equipment, bouldering and coaching are certainly tools which climbers have used to improve themselves and, in turn, move climbing forwards. Whilst in the main most people consider the birth of bouldering to be based around the exploits of John Gill in the 70s or maybe even before that when Pierre Allan made his first forays on the boulders of Fontainebleau in the 1930s, the truth is that bouldering started a long time before that. There is even evidence to suggest that Fontainebleau was first used as a training ground for the Alps, by Parisians, as far back as 1870. Whilst in the UK there was a small but dedicated team of climbers who started to boulder around the 1880s, bouldering was still viewed rather poorly by the more established rock-climbers of the time. Walter Haskett-Smith, widely considered the father of rock-climbing, said of a situation in the Lake District: "A queer shaped rock on Great Napes, which in the middle of March 1898 was gravely attacked by a large party comprising some five or six of the strongest climbers in England. It is a little difficult to find, especially in seasons when the grass is at all long."

Eckenstein, who was a leading proponent of bouldering and was undoubtedly involved with this, along with Aleister 'The Beast' Crowley, along with others, produced a mini guide to a boulder behind the Wasdale Head Hotel. The mini guide included a basic topo by artist L A Legros and descriptions of the problems. Crowley described Eckenstein's climbing as 'invariably clean, orderly and intelligible' and that 'there is a climb on the East

Face of the Y-Shaped boulder .... near Wasdale (sic) Head Hotel which he was the only man to do, though many quite first-rate climbers tried'.

One of the earliest references to Eckenstein and his use of bouldering to hone skills comes from Eric Newby in *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, who said: "After a large, old-fashioned tea at the inn with crumpets and hard-boiled eggs, we were taken on to climb the Eckenstein Boulder. Oscar Eckenstein was a renowned climber at the end of the 19th century, whose principal claim to fame was that he had been the first man in history in this or any other country to study the techniques of holds and balance on rock. He had spent his formative years crawling over the boulder that now bears his name. Although it was quite small, about the size of a delivery van, his boulder was said to apparently embody all the fundamental problems that are such a joy to mountaineers and were proving such a nightmare to us."

Later references to him appeared in *Mountaineering in Britain* by R W Clark and E C Pyatt who credit him with formulating... 'the new balance technique of climbing which was ultimately to revolutionise the standards of rock work... [he was] a queer character, a railway engineer who applied to the problems of climbing difficult rocks the principles of stress and strain which he utilised in his work'. It is interesting that he explored techniques for 'balanced climbing' back in the 19th century, more than 100 years before the veritable explosion in coaching climbing. Which today is a booming industry with at least two different coach awards and an emphasis on fundamental climbing movements and balanced climbing.

You wonder whether if Oscar's workshops had taken off whether climbing coaching and climbing itself would be far more advanced than it is today. As it was, in the early days of climbing, there was no need for instructors or coaches. Instead the clubs that formed both formal and informal links had a way to mentor new climbers into our sport. Even today there are a few people who still believe that there is no place for coaches or instructors and the traditional mentorship should be embraced.

Similarly bouldering had a slow start, due in part to the view that it was inferior to roped climbing on mountains. As the gritstone edges made climbers realise that they didn't have to be truly in the mountains to practise their art and that cragging was as challenging, if not more so, than big mountain cliffs, the same is true of bouldering which today has a following that is committed to conquering the hardest possible moves on rock. The result has been that climbing difficulty has increased.

It will be interesting to see in the future whether coaching will help project British climbing to an even greater level than it is currently at. However, discerning whether it is due to coaching, bouldering, or technological advances will become harder and harder. What is interesting is at the moment, based on millions of climbs logged via one website from thousands of different climbers, and despite all the technological advances I have covered in this and other articles, the average grade is still only Hard Severe in standard and that the average grade has in fact dropped from VS in the 1990s. On the plus side the maximum grades logged have risen steadily over time and based on BMC and government statistics participation has never been higher.

The fact remains that for me, and pretty much any other generation of rock-climbers and mountaineers, that technology has made climbing easier and safer within our own lifetimes. That is probably a key point, as whilst participation has gone up, mountain rescue call-outs for rock-climbing incidents have remained fairly constant. Why that is the case is beyond the purview of this series of articles that has come to an end. We have gone from having nothing more than a hemp rope and the climbers wit, to a place where there are countless pieces of equipment designed to make climbing safer and easier. ■



# Tradfest coming soon



▲ Hazel Findlay talking at last year's Tradfest. Photo: David Simmonite



◀ The hogroast proved very popular on the Saturday evening at last year's Tradfest. Photo: David Simmonite

After its successful phoenix-like relaunch in 2014, this year's Tradfest is back on June 5th to 7th 2015 celebrating all that there is to extol about trad climbing. As festivals go Tradfest weighs in as a little different, more relaxed, more informal and so more genial. Held at the camp site opposite the Vaynol Arms pub in Nant Perris at the foot of the Llanberis Pass, home to iconic crags such as Clogwyn y Grochan and Dinas Gromlech, a stone's throw from the mighty Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, 30 minutes from all that the Ogwen valley has to offer and access to crags like Craig yr Ysfa, an hour from Tremadog, the Moelwyns and the great walls of Gogarth, you are, literally, spoilt for choice.

It has a simple and informal format; evening time is for talks and mingling, daytime is for climbing. There is no coaching but there will be sponsored climbers and staff on hand from the festival's supporters who include DMM, V12, Scarpa, The North Face, Dewerstone and *Climber* magazine to give advice on crags and where to go climbing, with the chance to get out and climb at the same crag as those people that advise you. Get to know the local crags, climbs and hidden gems of Snowdonia and it's locale with a group of like-minded individuals.

It kicks off on the evening of Friday 5th June, continuing onto Sunday 7th. Friday evening is usually a quieter night as a lot of people don't make it up until late or until the Saturday morning but that makes it a more intimate affair with whomever is delivering the talk in the Scarpa Marquee, there is also a quiz to get the brain cells fizzing. Saturday is for climbing, while the evening is reserved for the hog roast, beer and headline talk, with the chance of some films if time permits. Sunday is for climbing and recovery before heading home at the end of the day.

There are no camping costs included in the ticket price but if you choose to stay at the camp site you simply pay for this separately. The only proviso for getting a ticket is that you are a member of the BMC or an affiliated club, this is for insurance purposes and proof that you have this must be supplied when you pick your ticket up, either at V12 if it is beforehand or at the Scarpa Marquee over the weekend.

Tickets are available from V12 Outdoor for £25 for which you get a goody bag on arrival that will include a limited edition Tradfest 2015 T Shirt, a DMM limited edition karabiner, a hog roast or similar (a vegetarian option will also be available), at least one pint of beer, access to all test kit, access to all talks and any other entertainment that will be laid on plus other goodies too.

Tradfest is an exclusive, low key, informal festival where all are welcome, no matter what their ability. Last year tickets were sold out and its unique atmosphere and setup make this a truly individual event where you can mingle with many of the greats of British climbing. There is no snobbery and don't expect everything to be run in a military style because it won't, it's relaxed and flexible and that's a major part of the reason that Tradfest has such a cult following already. ■

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## Connemara's Carrot Ridge by Terry Gifford

It was the Earl of Roden who suggested it: "Ireland's longest rock-climb – *Carrot Ridge*," he said, "just round the corner from here, up on the Connemara Bens. Come back and do it next year." I was staying at his house overlooking the orange-weeded shore of Cashel Bay, the sailing boat he co-owned with my future climbing partner bobbing offshore on a slight swell. It was to this house that the poet, Ted Hughes, had taken his partner, Assia Wevill, and their three children, three years after the tragic death of Hughes's wife, Sylvia Plath. It had been found for Hughes to rent by his friend, the Irish poet Richard Murphy, who sailed a boat called a Galway hooker, taking tourists out to the maze of islands offshore. I was also promised a chance to get on a hooker by Robert Jocelyn, Earl of Roden, when I returned. That would be something to tell my wife. Recently, Robert and his wife Ann, have been drawing people from all over Ireland to an annual Ted Hughes weekend at this house, Doonreagan, and I was lucky enough to be invited back in July last year as a speaker about Hughes's work. But this time I booked in for a week at one of their holiday lets in the hope of having just one day dry enough to attempt *Carrot Ridge*, a Diff of 370m.

Also at the Hughes weekend last year was Robert's sailing partner and co-owner of the boat, Lesley Emin, a lovely lady with streaming red hair and a wide smile who offered to do the climb with me as it was on her list too. She had retired early from business in London to 'work from home' just along the shore from Doonreagan and admitted to 'not actually doing much work from home' as Connemara activities: sailing, cycling, fishing, hill-walking and climbing and cultural events between the Galway and Clifden arts festivals, not to mention judging the All-Ireland Dog Show at Roundstone, took up so much time. Of course, judging a dog show and sailing in Connemara were clear indications that Lesley was into dangerous sports. It was in dark December when I asked her for a picture for this piece and she emailed me from her phone: 'I know the picture you are looking for and will forward tomorrow or Friday. You catch me aboard a boat in a Force 8/9 with the skipper and three RNLI lifeboat crew, all in our foul weather suits. The boat broke its moorings in a bad storm last night and the wind carried her across a bay and deposited her on a rocky shore. Now, we're waiting for the tide to float us off the rocks. Conditions not ideal (!) but no one hurt'. Last year she had been about to spend two months in the Himalaya climbing and trekking – a trip in which three of her party were killed by rockfall – so we had to wait for the next year's Hughes weekend anyway for *Carrot Ridge*. A whole year of waiting for a Diff might seem no big deal to many younger people. (You can even climb it on You Tube without leaving your chair.) But for me the route grew in all dimensions with the long anticipation and *Carrot Ridge* did not disappoint.

With permission from the farmer, we parked below his small house at the entrance to Gleninagh and stepped out into a landscape of the past. Below us were six white stones clearly visible embedded in the patchwork of July green grass and black peat. Tim Robinson's Connemara map marks this as 'SA' for Stone Alignment. At the winter solstice Robert and Ann still stand, aligning the stones, to watch the setting sun roll down the ridge of Bencorrbeg. Apparently Saint Patrick records that he arrived in Ireland



Lesley Emin emerging from the steep chimney.  
Photo: Terry Gifford ►

Lesley Emin looking up at *Carrot Ridge*, the white buttress at the very left of the crag. Photo: Terry Gifford ▼

to discover a country of sun worshippers. Having experienced the west of Ireland's 'four seasons in one day' on every one of my seven days in Connemara, I can totally sympathise with sun worshippers. In fact, I think I might be one myself. Beyond the stones was an embanked mound and from the climb we saw two fields of south-facing lazybeds that may have been in use for centuries. We were in an eastern bowl of the Twelve Connemara Bens, or Pins as they are known here, that held history, myth and wildness (forget footpaths) in a heady mixture stirred by the constant wind.

*Carrot Ridge* cannot be mistaken. It stands proud of the widest expanse of rock in view, marking its left edge, a white carrot shape that would turn slightly pink if the sun came out. The hour and a half walk-in goes from the track to a sheepfold, down to a river crossing, bog (gaiters are essential for walking-in anywhere in Ireland) of various hues, bleached bog oak roots, peat steps and loose rock. During the approach the carrot had shape-shifted into a banana. It's that kind of country. We started gearing up in sunshine, but by the time we'd tied on to the rope a mist had descended, dampening the rock. Lesley took a bearing to find our way back to the car if necessary. (It's the only time, in over 50





years, that I can recall rock-climbing with a partner with a compass round her neck for a possible escape, 'four seasons ...')

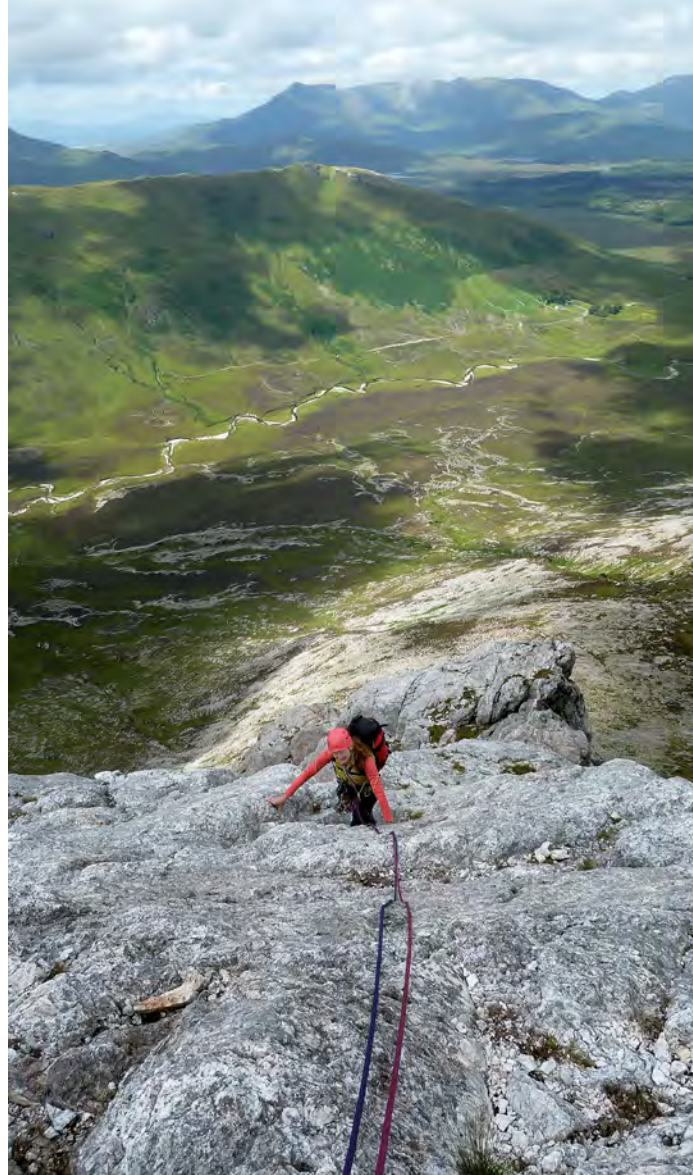
I stepped onto a marble staircase with little steps on its very left edge. It is a Diff designed by Michelangelo in exquisite compact marble reaching into the clouds in the land of sun worshippers. It was strangely difficult to tune in to this rock, to see what was flat and what was sloping. Right away my foot slipped off a wet hold. Caution tensed the senses and I found only one runner in the first pitch and two on each of the next two pitches. I had flown over to Ireland with only three Friends (2 to 3½) in my light rack and was very glad of them. We both agreed that the second pitch was the crux in our conditions, when finding flat footholds on which to step without slipping off was the key challenge. Stepping up and ever leftwards at the edge of the buttress was steep, but encouragingly unfolding, until an easing of the angle brought a wide ledge and (not the last) possible escape but the mist had lifted and the sun made an appearance. Again, wonderfully provided little flat nicks of marble led to another broad ledge and the view backwards over the whole glen which opened like old tale of invisible comings and goings of people and animals, weather and flora, small joys and the great hunger. Looking backwards was a rewarding theme of this climb in this historically rich, now apparently bleak landscape.

At another spacious ledge the mist dropped again and I was getting wet. "It's not really rain, only cloud," Lesley informed me. I pulled from a pouch my lightweight rain jacket, sold to runners as sealed-seam waterproof, which an Irish mist can expose as a lie within seconds. I'd not have been without it, however, as bright psychological encouragement on this long journey – of the mind coping with the body – that was to unfold on this endless route. Here I consulted a print-out from the guidebook, then found my own way up the everlasting buttress. An apparently smooth ramp leaned leftwards with a promising crack in its spine. Little flat footholds appeared unbidden, but I could not get a runner into the crack until quite high up. Then the buttress leaned back a bit. On following this pitch Lesley preferred to go right of the ramp up a wall and had difficulty getting across left again for my runner. A violent jerk on the rope solved that problem. When Lesley did her own thing, most things fell into place, including lunch. We were apparently above the First Step. The long day, route finding and damp rock-built tensions that were immediately defused on belay ledges, where, at some point Lesley revealed a lavish lunch pack that only

lacked the lobster sandwiches that the Earl had hinted might be in her rucksack. Again, we relaxed and looked outwards as cloud shadows caressed folds of green.

A traverse left into a recess brought us to the foot of an open corner where bridging led left again onto a platform. Scrambling for 90m on the ridge as it narrowed and levelled out below an easy slab gave momentum and rope drag. Above reared the Second Step, guarded by a wall that narrowed to the left. A pull through and a traverse right brought a groove which took gear and led to a slab of thinner moves and eventually a stance. All that was left was the Third Step that leaned back benignly and the easy scrambling suddenly ended at the top of the buttress. By now I was feeling very tired and had been alarmed by spasms of cramp in my left thigh. We coiled ropes and looked across at the recommended scree descent beside the buttress. The boulders were huge and my knees screamed at the sight of them. Neither of us was drawn to embrace them. So it was over Bencollaghduff on our right to descend to the head of Gleninagh where an ancient path the length of the glen had been becoming more distinct and attractive as we had gained height with each stance. But first there was another 200m of ascent from the col at Mám na bhFonsai, just above *Carrot Ridge*, from which the view south suddenly revealed a sparkling sea.

Lesley was concerned about my body language which was registering 'fairly knackered'. But her look around the corner for a traverse below the summit to the col on the other side was unpromising. Actually, the gentle slabs ascending Bencollaghduff were not too bad and, after a huge false summit cairn, the views from the top of sun-shafted sea and islands off the complex coast around Roundstone were to live a long time in the memory. We needed to go west but the rocky hint of a path dropped south immediately from the summit. It soon disappeared and Lesley was leading the way through grass-fringed rock steps in a landscape I could not read. In English and Scottish mountains a vertical drop off was likely to indicate a crag below. But Lesley wore a way over the edge of little walls, down short gullies and round small outcrops. It was pathless, punishing country unlike any other I'd experienced. Quite apart from the inevitable rising and falling mists, this was serious mountain terrain. On the following Saturday, Lesley told me later, a walker died on these Bens, in mid-July. Finally, a long scree run brought us down to the col called Maumina where there nestled a half-circle stone shelter with stone seats and a wall just high enough



to cut the wind at the back's cold spot. Across the col, on the path that came up from Gleninagh, there was a stone offertory – a cairn with an inset shelf on which coins had been placed. You need all the saints on your side in these mountains.

We reached the car again at 8pm after 12 hours on the hill. On the TV in the back room of Lough Inagh Lodge, the first bar we came to, the World Cup Final was underway. It mattered far less than a simple seat, two pints of Guinness and Lesley's unfailing wide smile. At the restaurant at the back of the Cashel pub the Earl was generously hosting a final meal for speakers at the conference from which we'd been playing hooky on its last day. Apparently, when we entered, we *looked* as though we'd had a 12-hour day on the hill but we were just in time to order food. They had taken all the mussels. It mattered less than resting ours and two more pints of the delicious Black Stuff. A band was playing the old songs in the bar and still to come was a storm-tossed journey to an island on Macdara's Day, two days stalking a salmon and sailing on that fabled Galway hooker, the Truelight. But for the moment our day on *Carrot Ridge* was turning into its own fable that was much more than just the longest climb in Ireland. ■

The final pitch of *Carrot Ridge*.  
Photo: Terry Gifford



## Great Portland Street

### Millstone Edge Peak District

Once an aid climb, now one of the finest HVSs in the Peak, described by Stephen Coughlan and photographed by David Simmonite

ROUTE	LOCATION	FIRST ASCENT
<i>Great Portland Street</i> (HVS 5b)	Millstone	Unknown as A3 1957. FFA A Clarke 1963

The Peak District National Park was founded in 1951 and was the first of 15 to be established in the UK. The Peak Park is blessed with many gritstone edges, providing a fabulous playground for climbers from Britain and indeed all over the world. These edges come in many shapes and sizes but ultimately can roughly be categorised into two genres. These being the natural edges with the emphasis on balance and the belief in friction and the quarried edges which tend to give steeper, often more strenuous, climbing relying more on cracks and small edges for upward progress.

Millstone Edge falls very much within the second category and is one of the most impressive quarried edges in the Peak. In fact, in the same way that Stanage has been described as the 'Queen of Grit' Millstone could well be regarded as the 'King of Quarries'. Whereas the natural edges owe their existence mainly to the forces of nature, Millstone's distinctive corners, arêtes and cracks are very much the work of man. The edge faces southwest and as such catches the sun from late morning. The crag also occupies a prominent position just above the main road into Hathersage and due to its aspect takes on a beautiful red hue in the evening sunlight.

Most probably due to its rock architecture Millstone did not attract the early pioneers, as did the natural edges. When attention was turned to the crag in the early period rather than a pocket full of chockstones and rope slings festooned about the body the weapons of choice were pitons and peg hammers. It is the continued hammering in and removal of these pitons that enabled the second wave of climbers to free climb many of the cracks that were artificially widened by this ironmongery.

In 1957 the early publication *Further Developments in the Peak District* mentions *Great Portland Street* as A3, with no details of the first ascent. Records show that around that era a certain Mr Brown and associates visited Millstone establishing a number of free climbs; this almost certainly halted the piton predilection. The first recorded free ascent of the route was by Alan Clarke in 1963.

So enough of the preamble, I always feel that a visit to Millstone for me should coincide with an inner feeling of fitness and confidence.

In gritstone terms the crag is quite lofty and as previously intimated the routes tend to be quite steep and taxing. The rock being quarried has somewhat different frictional qualities to the natural edges too. *Great Portland Street* in reality is not the typical straight up corner and, in fact, the start is not a corner at all, but is what appears to be a slabby entry into the upper groove, or is it a corner? Looks pretty straightforward really. The route warrants the grade of HVS 5b, a very traditional grit grade, not quite E1 but sitting somewhere within a strange grade vortex, in other words a determined approach will pay dividends. Don't let this put you off as, although in reality, first acquaintance may not inspire, this is a great climb requiring a determined approach and demanding a variety of techniques.

**sitting somewhere within a strange grade vortex, in other words a determined approach will pay dividends**

As is often the case with this rock type looks can most certainly deceive. Having quickly scampered up to the initial small ledge it is quite easy to place a bomber runner in the deep crack just below and right of the start of the groove, there are more placements below if you feel you need to boost your confidence or if like me your motto is 'the more the merrier'. Let the fun commence; where did that slabby bit go? Some say the best place for the crux of a route is right at the top, you'll be happy with where it is on this occasion. Using a combination of small footholds and the disappointingly rounded selection of handholds it is somehow possible to execute the fabled mantelshelf move, pushing down with your right hand like a mad thing it is possible to reach a reasonable handhold and with an almighty effort gain a standing position at the foot of the groove.

As the sun sets on a late winter's day a climber looks to make the moves out of the long grooved corner of *Great Portland Street* (HVS 5a) one of the classic quarried grit routes.

The definitive guide describes this manoeuvre as 'a bit like getting out of an overhanging swimming pool', a statement you can only appreciate post execution of said moves. So now with the 5b crux despatched it's simply a matter of negotiating the beckoning sustained 5a corner above.

Continuing upwards the line trends to the left slightly for a short distance making progress a tad more awkward than expected, in addition the crack bounded by the opposing sides widens a little, giving an opportunity to place the larger cams you decided to bring with you, didn't you? Some technical laybacking and bridging using small footholds on the main wall soon deposits you over the top of this slight bulge where the crack narrows, thankfully accepting good wires. Never too difficult the climbing still requires a steady approach and good bridging technique to keep the weight off your ever-tiring arms.

After more classic climbing in a similar vein where, as ever, good footwork will pay dividends in mitigating the strenuous nature of the route, at about three quarters height you encounter a couple of relics from that bygone era. Having judiciously arranged protection using the *in-situ* pegs and associated tat as desired it is possible to reach up and leftwards to gain a good edge and move a little more onto the left wall. Now the nature of the climbing changes, using a combination of these edges, that gradually increase in size as height is gained, and holds on the right arête of the corner, you will soon find yourself sat on the large flat ledge that is the top of the route. Albeit with that run-out feeling as the ancient pegs previously clipped are now a little distant. Although not strictly the top of the crag what remains somewhat further back is just the usual Millstone meander up the looser strata layers.

Now belayed and sat atop with that great feeling of fulfilment that only getting up a route of this quality can deliver you can revel in the experience and in a sporting way spare a thought for your second and the fact that in spite of having the benefit of watching you climb the crux this knowledge will be of no help whatsoever as they battle their way through those crux moves. ■











# BOSHERSTON HEAD

## WHAT'S THE BIG ISSUE?

by Sam Brown Photography by David Simmonite

Bosherston Head has everything that makes climbing in Pembrokeshire great: views; crashing waves rushing in with the tides to smash underneath your feet; the occasional, curious seal popping up and steep, juggy limestone with classy protection. Those who aren't lucky enough to enjoy Pembrokeshire ambience all the time perhaps find Bosherston Head a little intimidating and, unfortunately, this crag is often overlooked in favour of its more famous and popular neighbours, Stennis Head and Huntsman's Leap. This is a shame as there are fine routes for all levels on this crag.

The cliff is made from limestone rising up to a grand height of 45m in places, with single and multi-pitch routes reaching 63m in length. For most routes you'll need to ab in and care should be taken to ensure you reach the right starting point. The terrain can be tricky to read from above and beware the tides. You can't expect to wander idly up to a nice non-tidal belay platform and find a route that looks amenable. The Head is broken up into numerous buttresses and zawns, each with their own tidal status and micro-climate. It's also on MOD land that is both active and sensitive and so not always accessible. The surrounding cliff tops are used for live ammunition exercises.

Climbing is allowed mainly in the evenings and on weekends. If in any doubt, you can check by calling the guards' office, telephone 01646 662367 from 16.30 hours each day to hear the firing programme for the following day. A big red flag and guard will be clearly visible on the range to ensure unauthorised entry is not possible during MOD exercise time, so while it is very unlikely you'll be blown unexpectedly to smithereens do check ahead before walking in.

The topography of the crag can make access complex. Abseiling in from one point will give a choice of some routes to climb, but abseiling in a few yards further on may bring you to a very different point.

Bosherston Head, therefore, calls for a little more commitment and planning than nearby options where you can ab in, or scramble down, and plan from there. The rewards, however, will be exceptional. All those tricky-to-navigate sections can mean having your own personal crag on a busy bank holiday weekend when the rest of Pembroke is heaving with climbers and many of the routes are absolute crackers. Much of the Head is south-facing and beautifully sunny even on cold days. The various facets mean it's almost always possible to find shelter from the wind or shady climbing in high summer. ►

Eddie Gianelli leads the superb *Sunny Corner* (HVS 5a) on the West Face of Bosherston Head. This route takes unbelievable ground for the grade and requires both a confident leader and second.





▲ One of the stand-out technical wall climbs in Pembroke is this route *Keelhaul* (E2 5c).

Caroline Ciavaldini makes light work of the slim soaring groove of *Big in America* (E6 6b) on the East Face of Bosherton Head. ►

The setting is as good as any in Pembroke, which is a pretty big call on this spectacular coastline. Bosherton Head sunsets are strong contenders for the UK's best and it's not uncommon to see dolphins, porpoise, seals and sometimes even sea otters below. If the weather has been calm, the sea is clear turquoise shading out to sapphire. Until you dip a toe into the water (seasonally either very chilly to perishing cold according to anyone not familiar with Northern European seas) it is hard to see why people ever go to the Mediterranean for seaside holidays.

To be fair, the above applies to neighbouring crags as well. The Pembroke coast is a bit special, a truly stunning landscape. Of all the reasons to leave the

familiar comforts of Stennis and Saddle Heads behind, the quality of routes is what sets Bosherton Head apart. It is a quintessential Pembroke experience, with all the challenges and rewards. The area was once home to the hardest trad route in the UK, (*The Big Issue* E9 6c) and the rest of the Head is packed with classic lines, famous names and experiences that will etch themselves into your memory (in a good way). Aside from a range of excellent climbs and perfect Pembroke ambience, Bosherton Head was also the scene for an adventure that has – if nothing else – resulted in a story on which my long-suffering climbing partner has been dining out for years.

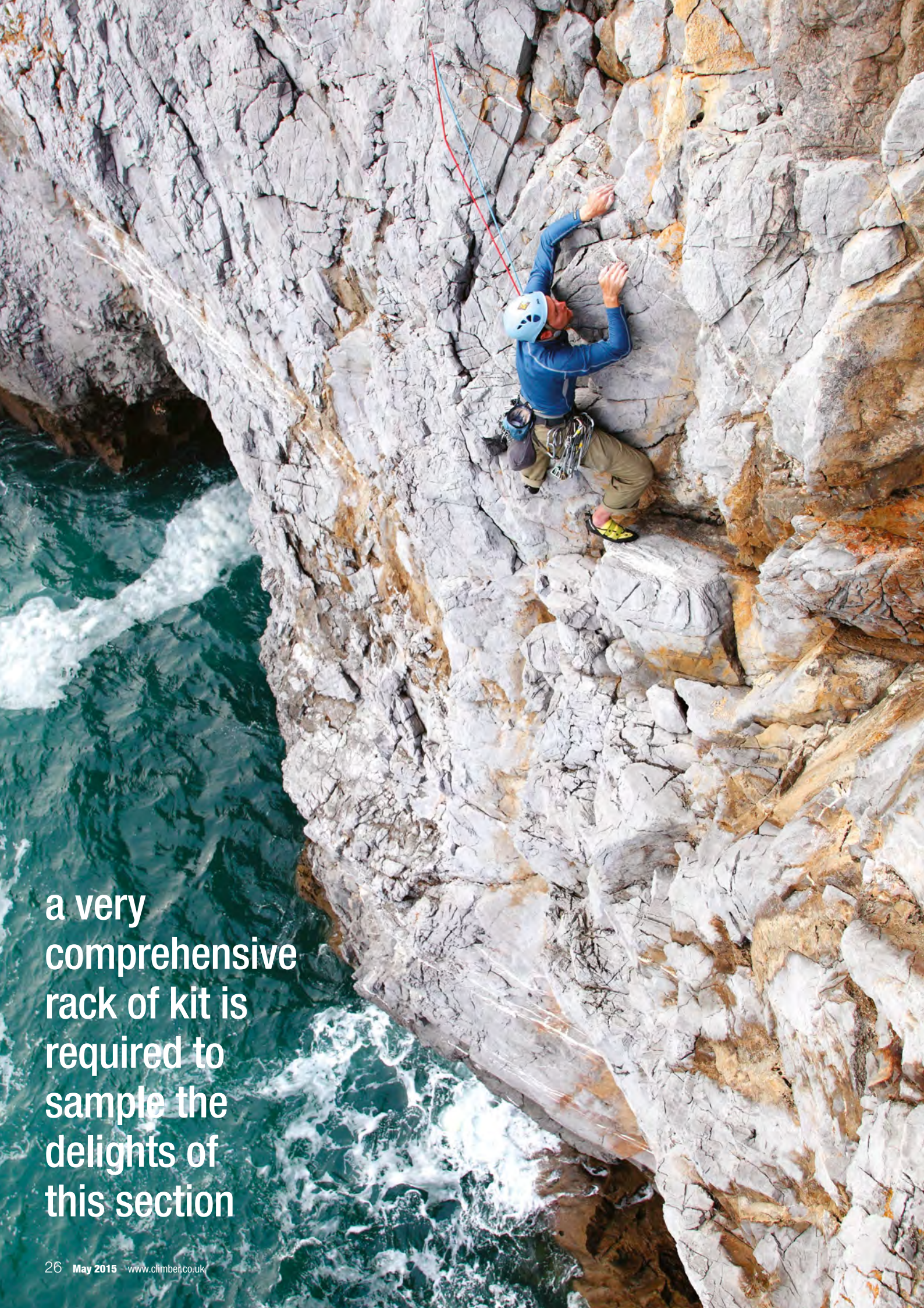
On a particularly hot July day, I abseiled down in search of a classic route with my brand new and very tight shoes slipped off my heels for comfort. One of these took a tumble into the sea well below the belay platform and began a merry, bobbing journey towards Ireland. A few moments brought the half ropes down with my partner very quickly indeed. From my panicked shouting and hand gestures she thought the rope must be sawing through somewhere up above and made an extremely speedy descent. Abbing off the end of a rope from a hastily set-up anchor, I stripped off (the long-suffering partner averting her eyes in proper ladylike fashion) and jumped into the sea. It is, as mentioned above, extremely chilly even in summer. The shoe was soon retrieved but then we had another problem. The belay ledge was undercut, with the waves surging a couple of metres underneath. Unaided ascent was impossible and prusiking up impractical. I'm not a strong swimmer and putting a harness on while treading water didn't feel like a good idea for safety reasons, to say nothing of the potential chafing. A dog-paddling reconnaissance revealed a possible route up out of the big blue on steep but less desperately steep ground perhaps 20m to the left. The (by now somewhat concerned) partner agreed to solo out to a point from which an anchor could be made and drop a rope to assist. Unfortunately, due to a mixture of hypothermia-induced impaired judgement, bad luck, and the obvious communication difficulties, eventual eye contact was made between this anchor and my good self when I was a good 15m up and further to the left. The resulting deep water solo experience (in one wet climbing shoe and nothing else) is not listed in the new guide and should not be repeated, at least without two dry shoes and some pants.

But I digress; Bosherton Head is home to two genuinely famous names: the *Keelhaul* slab and the aforementioned *The Big Issue*. Together they represent a spectrum from suitably technical E2 to controversial challenge. The area around *Keelhaul* offers incredible routes of a long, involved nature which call for skill and technical ability. Grades range from Diff and HVS on up, so this is not just a venue for E numbers, although most routes are quite lengthy and require some stamina at about 30m. The two most famous routes in this section are the aforementioned *Keelhaul* (E2 5c) and the exquisite *Ghost Ship* (E3 5c). *Keelhaul* is a de Montjoye classic put up in 1980, just making the first Pembroke guide. It's a 30m route with takes an exceptional, technical line direct up the slab. ►









a very  
comprehensive  
rack of kit is  
required to  
sample the  
delights of  
this section



Once that has been surmounted in appropriate style, the only thing keeping you from a glorious top-out is 10m of overhanging grooves but these are never too burly. This is a real gift from a major contributor to the development of West Wales. *Ghost Ship* is a Pat Littlejohn route dating from 1985; Littlejohn is no stranger to classic first ascents in the UK but *Ghost Ship* has to be among his loveliest work. The climb really has it all, with technical, slabby sections and overhanging exposure as well. There are few climbing moments that offer more elation than stepping across the *Ghost Ship* slab and around the arête to enter the unknown.

The West Wall is the exceptionally smooth, overhanging wall which is the home to *The Big Issue*. This amazing orange wall looks like one of Europe's finest, stolen and imported. It's steep and hard ground – for many years this wall was skirted around and then traversed across rather than taken head-on. This way offers many fantastic routes but avoids the main challenge. The gauntlet was first taken up by strong man, Pete Oxley, but with bolts and fixed protection, quite unusual for this part of the world. It was John Dunne who really took a big bite into this wall with the route he called *The Big Issue* and that wasn't until 1996. He removed the fixed gear and climbed the wall with some pre-placed protection, a significant step forward on a remarkably hard piece of rock. This gave the UK its hardest route of the time at E9 6c.

This route has only received a few ascents to date. The most notable was by Yuji Hirayama in 2014, the first ascent of the route placing all the gear on lead. This was an amazing effort setting the bar high for any other contenders. Perhaps the most impressive thing about this ascent is that Yuji, who is based in Tokyo, had only done a handful of trad routes before. Just days before, Yuji was asking for advice on what kit to use on much easier, well-travelled routes. This really reflects on the skills of a climber with 30 years of routes under his belt and should be a true inspiration, *The Big Issue* still awaits a full ground-up ascent. A piece of cake for a trad route with moves at about F8a+.

Bosherston Head has plenty to offer us mortals as well. One of the best and most enjoyable routes is *Sunny Corner* (HVS 5a). The free-hanging abseil into the zawn provides the first taste of spicy goodness. Anyone comfortable at the grade should come out sweating and buzzing, calling it an absolutely classic. Climbers at about VS might emerge a little shaken at the top but the kit is as good as the climbing, which is ace. Nearby is *Off the Wrist*, which is a steep E2 5b, and well-endowed with good holds and kit; the no-hands, inverted knee-bar at the top is a must for the full tick.

The biggest of all the faces on Bosherston Head has to be the South Face. This face is home to many routes which hold classy climbing, graded from HS to E4. The entry to this cliff is guarded by a 40m abseil and most of the ab points rely on thread and wire gear. Also you will need kit to set up a suitable belay at the base, although for many the ab rope can be used as your main anchor. Needless to say a very comprehensive rack of kit is required to sample the delights of this section. As the cliff is steep at the top it can make route finding from above more exciting/difficult. The most recognisable feature is the large cave about halfway along this magnificent crag.

The base of the crag is of a slabby nature, becoming steeper and steeper towards the top, although the rock is very well-featured offering good holds, kit and rests 30m above the sea. The best place to sample this section of cliff first off is from the belay of *Quoin* (HS 4a). This is reached by abseiling in the west arête, which divides the previously mentioned *Sunny Corner* from the South Face. The white, often sun-bleached, ledge at the bottom is lovely and unintimidating to belay from unless there is a big sea running.

Once down on the face *Quoin* is a very fine climb which takes the arête of your abseil. It is never difficult or bold but always very atmospheric and is exceptionally exciting when you take into consideration the approach length and commitment with it being the easiest climb out. Although not having quite the intensive initial wow factor of similar classics on Saddle Head it does offer an unpolished adventure on which you won't have to contend with hordes of other climbers. I really rate this route for any HS climber. The belay ledge of *Quoin* is also the starting point of many other routes on the face including two very good HVS routes both 40 metres in length giving independent climbing on solid lines: *Poltergeist* (HVS 5a) and *Telekinesis* (HVS 5a). The climbing on these routes is more suited to those who enjoy the technicalities of face and groove climbing. Both lines are littered with bomber kit and massive holds and being able to use your feet will ensure you get to take in the stunning position rather than being focused on your arms exploding from pump.

The most famous of routes leaving this ledge are *Preposterous Tales* (E2 5b, 5a, 5a) and *High Life* (E2 5a, 5c). *Preposterous Tales* dives into the dark cave and wiggles and squirms through heinous positions to re-appear out a small hole in the headland; only those with a feeling a need for dark cold dank places may enjoy what this has to offer. Those of you that share my love



of the sun on your back and the beautiful sea below you will be much better suited to the classic traverse line of *High Life*. This is a late addition to classics of the E2 grade, showing that Pembroke just keeps giving. It traverses the length of the cliff on a rightwards diagonal line, heading at first steeply right for 40m will take you tip-toeing over the cave of *Preposterous*, then across the face to reach a belay in the groove of *Wavelength* (E3 5c). For the second pitch you disappear on a horizontal pocketed crack out of sight of the belayer, throwing down some funky 3D moves will enable you to place kit and rest your arms before you strike up the steep overhanging flake crack up the rib with the goal of easier climbing above and the threat of a free fall down the face below. I feel this route offers much better climbing than that of the well-known *Heart of Darkness* on Mowingword and is a true Pembroke classic traverse line and we have Pembroke explorers Paul Donnithorne and Emma Alsford to thank for it. ►

▲ Caroline Ciavaldini climbing the all-time Pembroke classic *Star Wars* (E4 5c) on the East Face.

◀ Jake Morgan leading *High Life* (E2 5a 5c) a stunning and airy traverse across the South Face.





I must also mention the classic steep groove of *Wavelength* (E3 5c). This superb route is very isolated, which adds a lot to the experience, and is just to the left of the large cave bang in the centre of the cliff right at sea level where there is a small belay stance below a hanging chimney. You follow this chimney to the top then break out left and follow the obvious line skirting around the steep cave. Thankfully, at the top of this, there is a rest where you get to gather your thoughts, take in the exposure and tackle the steep baffling smooth groove above. This route, looked down on from *High Life*, looks like it may be a soft touch but it should not be underestimated as it is firm for the grade.

More needs to be said at this point about *Preposterous Tales*, which is not just any old E2 5b. Now many people have heard of this route but only adventurers/crazies/masochists have taken it on. I am not sure if this route should be mentioned in a climbing magazine or a vertical caving magazine. This is the one to go for when your shoulders are burnt to a crisp from the reflections off the stunning blue waters of the Irish Sea, or you are just feeling brave and mental. It is quite rightly described in the new *CC Pembroke Range East* guidebook as 'outrageous'. The first pitch was once graded HVS, but is an absolute dream at the new grade. *Preposterous Tales* starts high above the water on amazing holds and with great kit like a real Pembroke classic. Then the route disappears into complete darkness where only those with the most troglodytic tendencies will feel at home. It then heads steeply up through a boulder-choked chimney to reappear two-and-a-bit pitches later in the sink hole much further inland than you would ever imagine. Needless to say a head torch is required. A sense of humour won't hurt either.

However it can also be the place to have an epic, as Dave Viggers recalls, 'You may be tempted by the wholesome prose and the multitudinous stars heaped upon *Preposterous Tales*. To tick this very different style of route you'll need to be a confident team, pretty well-matched to cope with its traversing and, if operating at your maximum, be at the end of a warm, dry spell. As you'd expect, for such a subterranean route, it is often damp, and can feel all of its grade and more – unfortunately the extent of the damp can't be ascertained until the end of pitch 1. Just how damp can it get? In a big sea, the cave acts like an inverted funnel, condensing any waves into a plume of water extending 30m above the cliff top – stay away in stormy conditions.



If you do go in, spare a thought for the climber who, seconding halfway up pitch 2, slipped on damp rock and dislocated his shoulder. In spasmodic, debilitating pain, with evening coming on, the tide rising and with no one in earshot, this was a parlous situation for the unfortunate victim. The leader was forced to solo out to seek help, somewhat freaked, it has to be said as the second was busy dealing with the pain and unable to belay. Help was at hand, but the solution was how to get him out was not at all clear, conventional rescue techniques of boats and choppers would not work in this situation. An abseil in established to me that he was tucked high up in the roof of the cave, some 10m horizontally away from the finishing tube, necessitating precarious manoeuvres just to reach him. Lacking any medical knowledge, first aid was out of the question and I was beginning to feel very out of my depth, as the urgency of the situation escalated. Buying time with securing the belay a plan slowly came together, hampered by periodic moaning from our hapless victim. Getting the surface team to pull in the slack in his climbing ropes and, using my abseil rope, he was lowered out over the waves, eyes wide shut, until he could be slowly hauled out and into the waiting ambulance, minus his wallet, just for safekeeping, you understand'.

There is enough serious quality at Bosherton Head to make it a climbing destination to rival anything in Pembroke, if not Wales, and taking a plunge over the edge to get down there may be the only thing stopping more people from getting a bite of these delights. If you should happen to ab down at the wrong point it usually becomes apparent pretty quickly and if you pop six metres or so over the edge and oh my golly gosh this is no way where I thought it was, prusiks are your friend and you'll soon be back out again if you know how to use them. Many of the classics are visible or identifiable from above.

Tucked around the other side of the headland, and best located by following the west wall of Stennis Ford to its end and a little further, is the grand East Face of Bosherton Head. Home to the amazing *Star Wars* (E4 5c) which is superb, and like most of the routes in this sector is ideal for those who enjoy exposure, small wires, and sustained technical climbing. It has been suggested (by a sandbagging friend who shall remain nameless) that *Star Wars* is a steady route which makes an excellent warm-up. His stamina and fearlessness are both much greater than mine. I should have realised that such people should not be listened to.



On my first foray onto the *Star Wars* face I abbed down the corner to a small ledge, close to high tide. The plan was to take his advice and treat this route as a deep water solo and a warm-up for bigger things. It very quickly became obvious that this wall is both steeper and longer than expected, not at all the pushover described.

**This is the one to go for when your shoulders are burnt to a crisp from the reflections off the stunning blue waters of the Irish Sea, or you are just feeling brave and mental**

Although I eventually emerged at the top with dry feet, it was as a pumped, sweating, jabbering wreck. Being far too wrecked to continue with the plan for the rest of the day, the next few hours were spent re-living every move of the 'warm-up' and moaning quietly. However, *Star Wars* is classy and offers stunning climbing with brilliant moves, but is serious business despite the relatively friendly technical grade.

Any suitability for deep water soloing is debatable.

Even more serious is the much-admired but rarely travelled sector just to the east of *Star Wars*. This steep, well-featured wall is home to the extremely impressive *Big in America* (E6 6b), a slim and soaring 40m groove. A bold start is soon forgotten when you reach great kit and doubly banished from mind on the even harder crux section above. Then there is one more technical section with a bomber thread you will be very pleased to see and easier climbing above. *Big in America* is one of my favourite routes in Pembroke, and like so many on Bosherton Head, it's not just about the line, the kit, or even the big reputation (although I like a bit of all those and this route has them in spades). It was about the whole perfect Pembroke package, from the waves below to the quality of the moves and was climbed on a day when I decided to take a real challenge and push myself with a stiff on-sight and walked past the comforts of familiar and well-trafficked lines, bit the bullet, and had a real adventure. It may take five or 10 minutes of scouting but with a taste for something new and a carefully reading of the guidebook (or a little help from the locals), you'll find some real gems at almost any grade at Bosherton Head. Next time you climb in Pembroke, walk past the popular spots and try this crag or one like it, take the road less travelled and see what else Pembroke has to offer. ■

▲ *Ivory Tower* (E2 6a) in the area of the same name. James Pearson climbing this route that is on many a tick list.

◀ Sam Brown climbing out of the steep groove section of the Pembroke classic *Ghost Ship* (E3 5c) on the left edge of the *Keelhaul* slab.



# Great Wolfrey

Words and  
photography  
by Mike Hutton

Occupying a clandestine location high on the Appletreewick moors of North Yorkshire is a crag for the true gritstone connoisseur. Rumours of over 65 lines on the finest, silvery grit were enough to tempt Mike Hutton away from the crowds of the Peak District to enjoy a day of true solitude.

It is madness for sheep to  
talk peace with a wolf.  
THOMAS FULLER

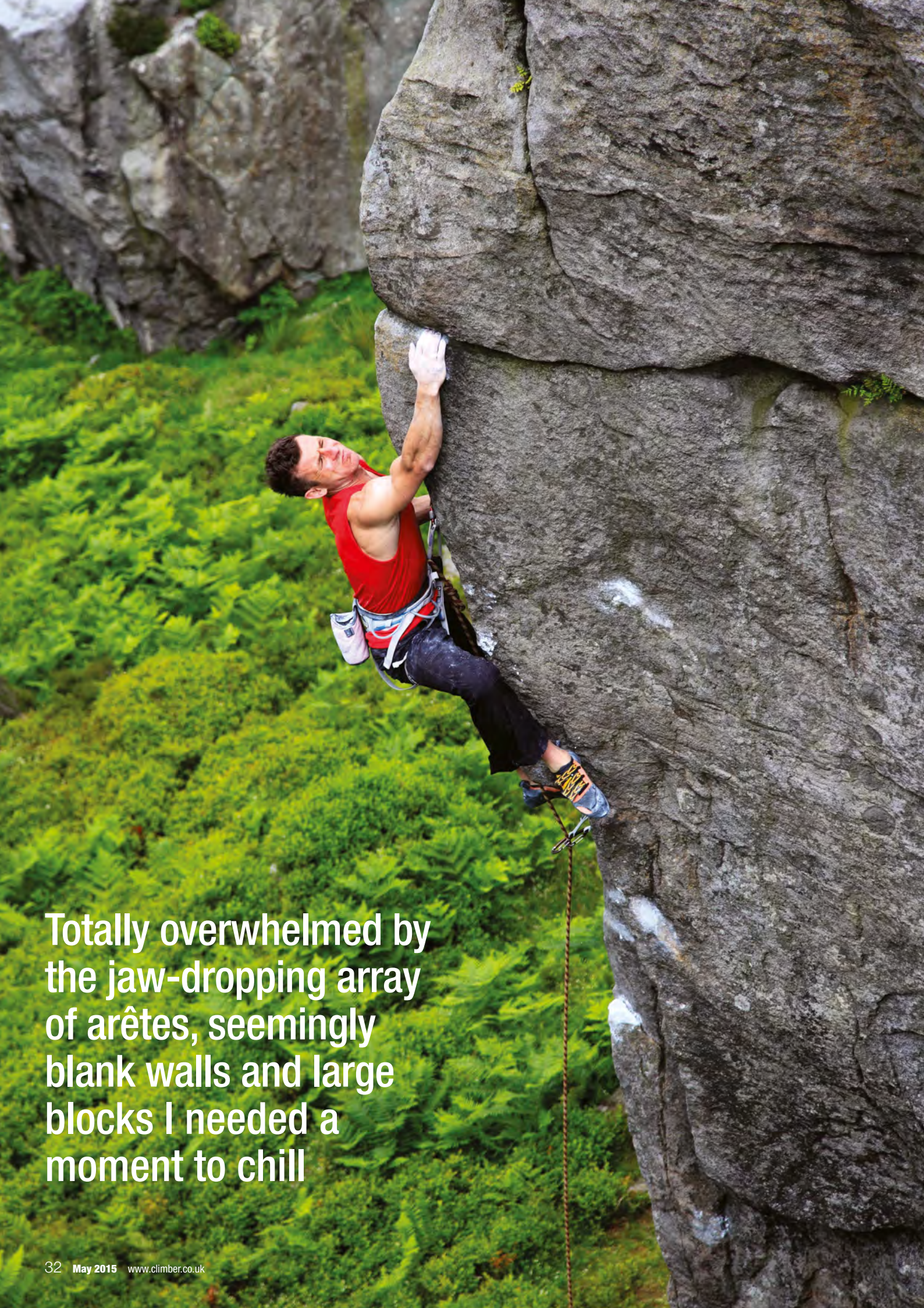
The shepherd drives the  
wolf from the sheep's (sic)  
for which the sheep thanks  
the shepherd as his liberator,  
while the wolf denounces  
him for the same act as the  
destroyer of liberty. Plainly,  
the sheep and the wolf are  
not agreed upon a definition  
of liberty.  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN





Richard Mallinson enjoying an airy position on the superb highball arête of *Walter's Rib* (E2 5c).





Totally overwhelmed by the jaw-dropping array of arêtes, seemingly blank walls and large blocks I needed a moment to chill



When Dave 'Sutonator' Sutcliffe (Yorkshire's best mountain biking fireman according to Jordan Buys) put the idea into my head of visiting Yorkshire's most remote crag I instantly painted in my head a picture of climbing on a wild landscape that in times gone by had been home to the wolves. Now Dave isn't afraid of an arduous walk onto the fells in order to scope out something new and that's often after a full morning's mountain biking. So, on Dave's recommendation I planned on an overnight stay in the eerie Grimwith Reservoir car park in order to make a swift start the next morning. I never could be sure whether it had been the swirling mist or the strange Yorkshire ale that had played havoc with my imagination, but one thing was certain, there had been some strange antics going on in the car park that summer's evening. Maybe it was the wolves that had come down from the fells to haunt my dreams or more likely just a bit of local dogging from the other species.

As dawn broke, a sea of velvet-like mist hung low in the valley, gradually unveiling a series of pristine reflections in the deathly still reservoir. These were all bad omens for midges and poor gritstone conditions, I thought. When the Sutonator arrived he assured me all would be fine and that partner in crime Andy (also known as The Blade) has been delayed due to some beer extravaganza the previous night and would join up at the crag.

I chuckled as I read a classic quote by modern day activist, Paul Clarke. 'The first mat I saw was one Chris Sowden brought to the crag and was part of an old settee covered in plastic and tape. How we laughed (until its use became evident)'. How things had moved on I thought as we wrestled with our

enormous pads on the hour-long slog over the moors. There was a very good reason for our landing aids and that was the abundance of fine looking unprotected arêtes. As we neared our goal the worthwhile, but less grand, Wig Stones caught our attention for a second. Whilst having a decent selection of sub-Extreme micro problems these were dwarfed by the likes of Great Wolfrey. On first acquaintance it resembled a smaller version of Slipstones. Smaller only in the sense of the crag length, in fact, many of the routes were over 11m and had particularly badass landings.

Apart from a flea of activity in the 1950s by Jim Walton, Brian Smith and Ed Thackeray, Great Wolfrey didn't see much attention till well into the 80s. Not really surprising given the fact it's an hour-long slog to the top of a 450m hill. As is often the case with these remote crags, most folk aren't prepared to make the longer walks and the rewards come in the end to those that seek adventure. One such group, consisting of John McKenzie, Chris Sowden and Martin Berzins were to be the ones that created some of the crag's finest offerings. In fact, the three star *Little Red Riding Hood* (E6 6b) and *A Company of Wolves* (E6 6b) (wolves being the main theme for the route naming) are perhaps some of the best highball E6s in Yorkshire, yet they have seen little publicity.

Apart from the bold and striking arête line of *Walter's Rib* (E2 5c) which had been, snapped up by the likes of Ken Wood in the 70s these guys pretty much had the pick of all the major hard lines to go at. They created *Bad Company* (E1 5b) which is just one of the excellent easier arête lines. As is often the case after a prolonged surge of activity, places become out of vogue and it wasn't really till 2006 that anything significant was achieved.

It was, finally, Paul Clarke that cleared up some of the remaining lines up to E5. He should be commended for his discovery of the incredibly bold arête line of *Troubled with Lycans* (E5 6b) and also for his elegant way with words. For the record, Lycans are, in fictional terms, a second breed of werewolf created in the 11th century, *Werewolf* (E4 6a) being the original route to the right.

Totally overwhelmed by the jaw-dropping array of arêtes, seemingly blank walls and large blocks I needed a moment to chill and was quite content to sit back and watch while the excited Sutonator scoped out new lines that, hopefully, by the end of the day would become modern day classics. Despite years of development the entire right wall of the dominating North Pinnacle seemed completely devoid of lines. It seemed though that Sutonator had big plans for this blank piece of canvas. On a previous visit he had added a much harder and direct finish to the existing *Bad Company* and called it *Good Company* (E3 6a). The original line climbs tiny edges and crenulations boldly up the right side of the mighty North Pinnacle to some thank God gear in a big break and finishes up a big crack. Sutonator's even finer line quests further left along the break before launching up the hanging rib in quite an exposed position. ►

◀ Dave Sutcliffe in a wildly exposed position on the first ascent of *A Wolf of Wall Street* (E6 6c). One of the great last problems in the area.

Mike Hutton relishing good jams on the delightful crack of *Autumn Gold* (VS 4c). ▼







▲ Martin Berzins's *Little Red Riding Hood* (E6 6b) has to be an all time classic of the area. Climber Dave Sutcliffe on marginal crimps and with no intention of falling from this height.

A modern classic frightener on round holds galore that is just too high to be classed as a boulder problem; Dave Sutcliffe on the first ascent of *The Grey* (E6 6b). ►

The crème de la crème of the buttress has to be the shallow overhanging groove line to the left. Intense bouldery moves up the groove lead to iffy gear in the overlap (iffy because most of this fell out on the first ascent) then real out-there 6c moves up the tough rib. *A Wolf of Wall Street* (E6 6c), as it became known, is a brilliant modern day creation and a superb addition to two of the best E6s in Yorkshire. Keen to complete the trio of hard lines I watched in awe as Sutonator sketched his way up Martin Berzins's *Little Red Riding Hood* (E6 6b) in unbelievably sub-optimal conditions. The holds need a magnifying glass and a fall from the top section would have been curtains with our pathetic supply of pads.

As a roasting summer's day came to an end I vowed to return one day soon to Hoover up some of the easier classics that had caught my eye. When the big day came spirits were high despite the entire crag being cloaked in fog. As the northerly wind howled though the gullies and chilled us to the core it felt more like a land for the wolves than us feeble mortals. Like a pack of animals we huddled in the comfort of the sheltered boulders till a solitary beam of light signalled things were about to improve. I chose my moment and frantically slapped up towards the irreversible moves on *Walter's Rib* (E2 5c). Fearing for the worst and with fingers resembling block of ice I retreated to the safety of the pads while Sutonator's partner in crime, Mally, bit the bullet and went all-out for the top. As I frantically fired off frames with my camera the sky turned an evil shade of grey as beams of light shone on the arête for a matter of seconds. Mally just about maintained contact with the rock as the wind tried its best to throw him to the floor. Just to the right is the bold yet very amenable *In Memoriam* (E5 6a). I had unlocked the subtle sequence of side pulls and edges on a previous visit but in the current arctic conditions wasn't quite prepared to risk cratering from the high crux.

Having only just survived the wrath of the wind we opted for some of the shorter, less exposed lines on the elegant Little Wolfrey area that occupies a lonely position on the extreme left of the crag. The cluster of micro-routes was the perfect recipe for warming up our rigid bodies without the hassle of ropes and gear. Armed with pads we scampered between blocks ticking off problems

whilst trying to avoid the ankle-breaking holes in the heather. As I pulled onto the eye catching *Auternative Arête* (HVS 5a) with numb fingers and attempted to layback I became aware of how scrittly the fine grained gritstone was and struggled to trust my feet. A few attempts were all that was required to clean up this brilliant little problem. In reality these routes would be polished to death if they were just 10 minutes from the road. The fine crack of *Autumn Gold* (VS 4c) to the left is delightful and a perfect one to hone your jamming skills on. As the day drew to a close we dragged our frozen bodies from the wildest of Yorkshire crags on a promise that we would return someday to this unspoilt wilderness of stone. ■

## FACT FILE

### When to go

Great Wolfrey is on open access land meaning there should be no access issues apart from the occasional closure due to grouse shooting. Check the Regional Access Database on the BMC website. Clear, wind-free days in the spring and autumn are perfect for the routes. Most of the crag faces south with the occasional south east and south west faces and being at 450m it's very exposed to the prevailing wind. This is fine for its quick-drying properties but blood-freezing in the winter unless, of course, you come from Yorkshire.

### Gear

The routes vary between six and 11m so options for gear are very limited. You could break your back carrying in a whole rack and end up using just one piece. Far better to carry in a decent pad or two and a large supply of sandwiches and water. Hard lines can always be inspected with a short piece of rope for future visits with specific gear. A stiff brush on the end of a pole will come in handy for cleaning away the scritte.

### Where to stay, eat and drink

Do not stay overnight in the Grimwith Reservoir car park. This is owned by Yorkshire Water Board and patrolled at night by a guy who lives in the house next door. He likes climbers but won't do if you sleep in his car park. Mason's Campsite in Appletreewick is very close and has a brilliant 16th century pub, The Craven Arms down the road

### Guidebooks

All the routes and boulder problems can be found in the new *Yorkshire Gritstone Volume One* guide by Robin Nicholson and a team of volunteers from the YMC. Local climber, Paul Clarke, who has extensively developed the bouldering in later years, describes the area very well and by all accounts there is plenty to go at on the blocs. Dave Sutcliffe has produced a quality video of his recent first ascents which can be found at [vimeo.com/101647298](https://vimeo.com/101647298)

## MIKE'S TOP 5 WOLF ROUTES

### West Face (HS 4b)

A gem of a micro-route that climbs up the middle of the west face of the South Pinnacle on the far right of the crag.

### Great Wolfrey Buttress (VS 4c)

Climbs the whole height of the biggest buttress on the crag. Plenty of gear with a proper route feel about it.

### Auternative Arête (HVS 5a)

Delightful fingertip laybacking on the most scrittly of rock. Slightly too high to be classed as a boulder so employ a pad on this one.

### Walter's Rib (E2 5c)

Not to be missed. The crux on this eye-catching arête is rather too high to really fall from, even with pads. A good brushing will negate the need for an emergency top rope rescue.

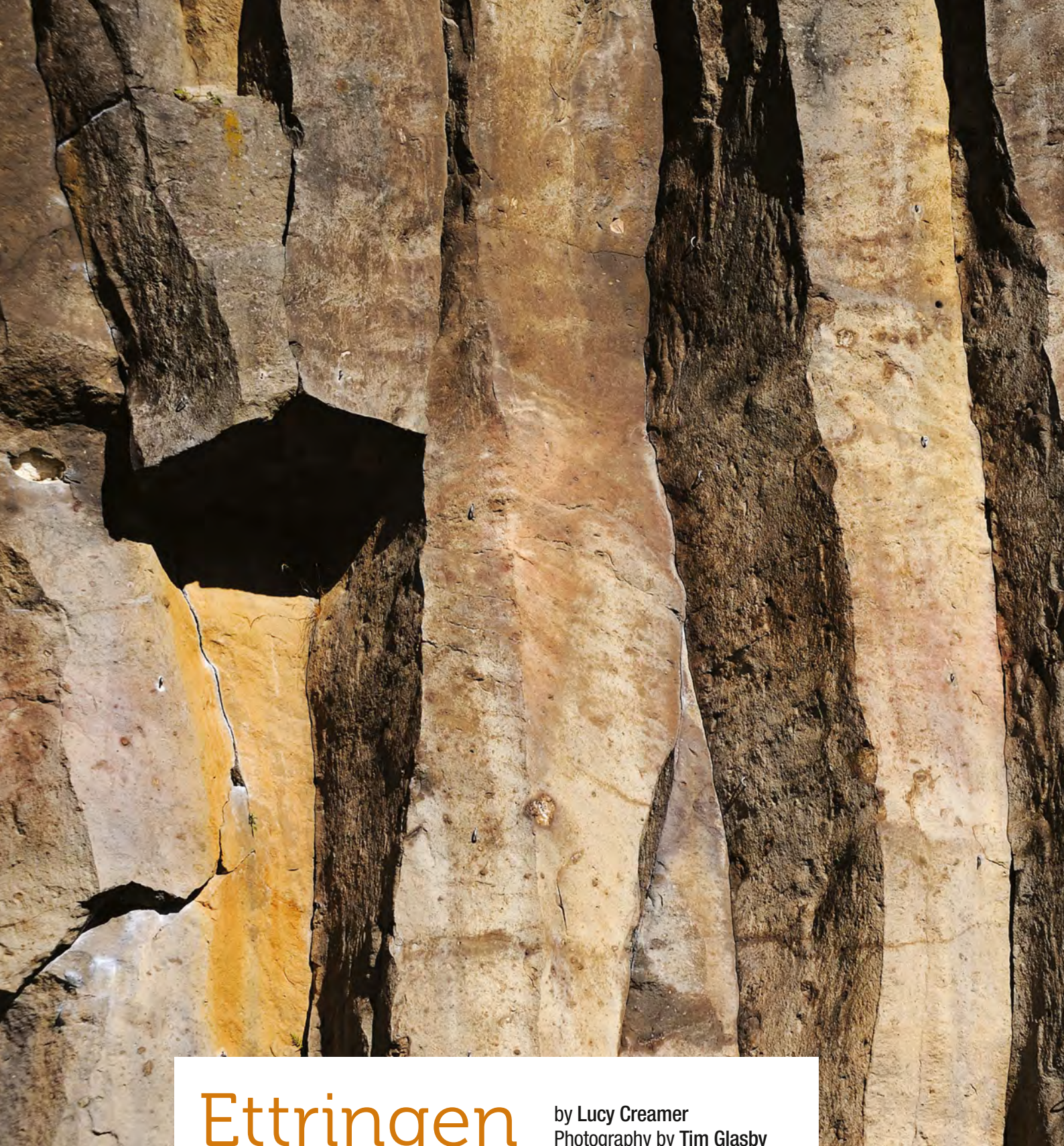
### Little Red Riding Hood (E6 6b)

Minute holds lead if you're lucky (or unlucky depending on your point of view) to an all-out lurch for the top. At nine metres this isn't one to muff.









# Ettringen

by Lucy Creamer  
Photography by Tim Glasby

I think it's fair to say that us Brits love our trad climbing but when we go away on a climbing holiday, it tends to be for some bolt clipping. Is this because the lure of sun-baked bolted routes is just too strong to resist? Quite probably, what's not to like? But it may also be that because even if we did want to go abroad trad climbing, the venues you hear about are scary, big and, let's face it, intimidating. Not most people's idea of a 'holiday'. But a couple of years ago, I came across a venue which is a short hop across the channel that may tick quite a few boxes for us travelling Brits. Such as: single pitch, a mix of trad and bolts, cracks of all shapes and sizes, nice weather and an easy drive from Calais/Dunkirk. Interested? Then please read on...





## DESTINATION

are other climbing styles to sample too. For the flexible, how about pelvic-splitting corners? Or for people with deft footwork, there are enticing groove systems and very technical faces. And the list goes on... there are even some burly roof climbs, to knee-bar and toe-hook your way up.

So that's a little about the climbing, what about the gear? Well, you definitely need to take your rack. But interesting ethics have developed there over the years, so what you'll find is a mixture of bolts and trad gear on most of the routes. Oddly, this strange mix doesn't seem to detract from the quality of the climbing experience and as my friend Jim Burton eloquently observed: "I felt that the routes which I did were neither sport nor trad but more a kind of trad route with sufficient bolts to save your life if you were rubbish at placing pro." Nice one Jim! For the purists, some routes are completely trad and conversely some are completely bolted but it's worth bearing in mind that it is advisable to carry a small amount of gear even on the purportedly bolted lines as they can feel more run-out than you'd like and having the solace of a lone cam can help at times. Interestingly, in the back of the local guidebook, there is a table indicating what each route takes regarding gear, which can be very useful but it is also worth remembering that this can be subjective and there's no substitute for standing at the bottom of the route and just looking up and making your own judgement. Most of the belays are very good, all being bolted and there is strictly no access from or to the top, so no summiting allowed, you must lower off.

From the climbing style to the crags themselves, well, where to start? There are loads of them. All with a different feel and aspect, many within walking distance of each other, making your climbing days full of variety and interest. The crags face all aspects, so whatever time of year you visit, you will always have a choice of venue to suit the prevailing weather.

The crag classic, and a must-do line, is *Zebulon* (8-) Sector Spektakulum, Bereich Gross Wand; Lucy Creamer climbing.

### A LITTLE BACKGROUND

The climbing area around Ettringen lies in a volcanic region called the East Eifel, not far south of Cologne. Due to heavy quarrying of the valued Basalt from the mid 19th century, a series of small to fairly sizeable and atmospheric quarries were created. The quarrying finally came to an end in the 70s and the land was left to return to nature but during the mid-80s, climbers started to explore this intriguing area and slowly unearthed the delights

of what was to become a miniature crack-climbing haven. As mentioned, the rock is basalt, which provides a unique medium on which to climb. The friction is undeniably good but it is the features and rock architecture that provide the real delights there. For the Indian Creek wannabes, there are cracks-a-plenty: off-widths, splitter-hands and finger crunching fissures. But if cracks aren't your cup of tea, there

### HOW IT WORKS; TIPS ON CRAGS AND RECOMMENDED ROUTES

There are two climbing areas Ettringen Lay and Kottenheimer Winfield. Within these, there are lots of smaller crags and various holes containing up to 700 routes. There is a big obvious car park at Ettringen Lay, about a kilometre south of the village. Parking for Kottenheimer Winfield is less obvious being in the forest at the start of many walking paths. ►



## ETTRINGEN LAY

A compact area consisting of six different sectors (smaller sectors within them) all within a five to 15-minute walk of each other, with Grosse Wand being one of the most popular and accessible. This will probably be the first place to head for as the access is very easy and there are many classics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Grosse Wand has been split into smaller sectors; it gets a lot of sun except for Sector Kelle leftwards.

### Sector Kelle

The must-do is *In der Kelle des Knopfgießers* (8). A great crack-line, bolted but you may want to take a couple of cams.

### Sector Amphitheatre

This contains a stunning crack, the route of the quarry if not one of the best cracks of the area, very popular and all trad, *Mut der Verzweiflung* (8+/9-).

### Sector America Traum

The must-do is *America Traum* (7) is tricky for the grade, challenging and gratifying. Bolted but some cams may be useful; do some stretching beforehand.

### Sector Spektaculum

Tired of cracks, then head for *Im taumel der triebe* (8). An appealing line with a bouldery start taking you up a groove and arête, high quality. Bolted but again a couple of cams could be advantageous. For a slightly easier variation, *Spektaculum* (7) is very good too, bolted.

### Sector Hölle

This slightly hidden sector is only small but has some very high quality routes and gives you a chance to escape any weekend crowds. Awesome cracks and a chance to climb through the 'window'... A must-do is *Hydra* (9), a stunning, hard, thin crack to test your skills, bolted. *Cross und Knackig* (8), climbs much better than it looks, not just a crack, and surprisingly pumpy in places, bolted. *Fegefauer* (8-) is another stunning crack that is pure trad and very rewarding. *Höllentor* (6+), is a must-climb, unique feature.

### Sector Schiffsbuch

A small crag but with some great mid-grade cracks, a sun trap. The must-do is *Mettwürstchen* (7+).

### Sector Music Hall

Not the best little crag but if you are a 'wide-boyz' wannabe you can have your

true HVS off-width experience on *Grond* (6), a number 6 cam is essential, unless you want to solo it.

### Sector Försterwand

A short little crag with a few gems, the must-do is *Happy Hippo* (7-), trad, with lovely climbing.

### Sector Mordor

A short hop across the road from the main car park and you can't miss the massive hole in the ground. Locals have done an amazing job of creating proper footpaths in this atmospheric quarry. Some of the longest routes around and they aren't all cracks. Quite a UK trad style, with more grooves and faces and very eye-catching lines. Mordor is also where you'll find the Bierkeller, steep bicep heaven with a lot of fixed quickdraws and shelter from the rain. The two caves do seep after heavy rain though, with the left one (Switte Grotte) taking longer to dry.

### Sector Erste Grotte

The must-do is *Softeis-lutscher* (8+/9-). A great 3D route and a good break from climbing cracks, knee bars essential. Wear trousers or even a kneepad if you have one. ▶

If you're climbing in the F7b+/7c bracket then head over and try the mega finger crack of *Mut der Verzweiflung* (8+/9) at Sector Amphitheater, Bereich Gross Wand. Lucy Creamer going for it on the on-sight. Finger tips to thin hand jams, this all trad route is a gently overhanging classic. ▶

Lucy Creamer warming up on *Phonix* (7-) Sector Gross Wand. One of the easier lines and a great introduction to the climbing at Ettringen. ▼

the rock  
is basalt,  
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to climb











in the back of the local guidebook, there is a table indicating what each route takes regarding gear, which can be very useful but it is also worth remembering that this can be subjective

If you speak German, there are plenty of information boards telling you about the geology and the history of Kottenheimer Winfield and it is a popular walking spot.

#### Sector Yosemite Wändchen

A sunny face with a host of short bolted routes. Popular but quite old school grades.

#### Sector Greenhorn

The must-do is *Saubermann* (6-) a very good, easy, short crack to hunt out; trad.

#### Sector Westkessel

One of the larger faces in Kottenheim with some very good routes. The must-do is *Fata Morgana* (9-). An appealing, technical, short, bolted crack, low in the grade but will test your footwork. Taking a few small cams might help boost your confidence.

#### Sector Kiefernadel

Just before you get to Westkessel on the right, there are routes with a little more height. The must-do is *Kiefernadel Normal-weg* (6), a pleasant intro and fully bolted.

#### The slightly esoteric Mayen area

This is where you come to practise your crack climbing techniques, as you will find hand to fist to off-width size, so don't miss this miniature Indian Creek lookalike, with splitter cracks and a concertina of basalt columns. On the way to Mayen from Ettringen there are three holes in the ground that lay hidden amongst farmers' fields. To get there drive 500m after the only roundabout between Ettringen and Mayen and on the left there is a grassed track blocked with boulders and room for two to three cars (as of Oct 2011). ►

▲ Michel Tres on the groove line of *Mordor* (7) Sector Tolkien, Mordor.

Jim Burton perfecting his 'grit technique' on the very first route to be climbed at Ettringen, the 'jamtastic' all-trad dihedral of *Mettwurstchen* (7+) Sector Schiffsbug, Bereich Durener Wand. ►

#### Sector Vide Cor Meum

The must-do is *Felsapel* (7), an interesting mixture of laybacking and a snaking groove, steeper than it looks; bolted.

#### Sector Tolkien

There are a number of good routes to do there, the must-do is *Mordor* (7). One of the longer routes following a groove system; bolted.

#### Sector Pumpgun and Lago di Mordor

A very atmospheric corner of the quarry and lines with a feel of adventure and unique belaying from a slung log over a lake required for some routes. The must-do is *Glüfing* (10-). One of the hardest routes in Ettringen, a stunning thin crack with no chalk on it; bolted.

#### KOTTENHEIMER WINFIELD

The Kottenheim area has a more wooded, almost Font, feel to it. The venues and routes are smaller in the main and require tramping along grassy trails that link the crags; there is an air of *The Lord of The Rings* and you wouldn't be surprised to glimpse a Hobbit scuttling around the ghostly husks of rusted cranes, ruined buildings and narrow gauge railway lines. It's a good venue to sample the basalt, as there are plenty of lower graded routes. It's picturesque and would be a great place for families or even a rest day (if you can bear to take one), of exploring the pathways and niches that lead to hidden crags. Most of the bouldering is dotted about the forest, with flat landings and low to the ground; a bouldering pad isn't a necessity.









Stijn Van Hulle on the steeper than it looks *Felsapel* (7) Sector Vide Cor Meum, Mordor. Climbed using an interesting mix of laybacking and bridging.

Walk in and search. Sector Finsterlay is well worth hunting out and lies rightwards surrounded by trees where a small hidden path leads you onto a trail down into the quarry. It is very quiet and possible to climb some of the routes in the rain. The rock is very smooth with barely any footholds at times. Unfortunately, Sector Schwarzer Zirkel has been used as a local rubbish tip, so only head there and Sector Dornental in the unlikely event you have run out of routes to do elsewhere.

## Sector Finsterlay

The must-do is *Feuertaufe* (7+), a demanding crack-line; very good. *Oger* (7+/8-) is even more demanding. Fist jamming, if they fit, if not it's a trying off-width. *1000 Teufel* (7), not just a crack and with some interesting climbing. *Blutiger Samstag* (6) is a very pleasant crack on which to start. ■

## LOGISTICS AND FURTHER INFO.

### When to go

Logistics and further information

### Fly

A good selection is available, easyJet fly from Gatwick to Cologne, Düsseldorf or Brussels. BMI Baby fly from East Midlands/Newcastle to Brussels. Jet 2 fly Leeds-Bradford to Düsseldorf. Ryanair fly Manchester/Edinburgh to Brussels, Stansted to Cologne, Edinburgh to Cologne.

### Drive

This is a very good option, as it's a short drive, gives you flexibility and is very convenient. Ferry to Dunkirk: DFDS seaways ([www.dfdsseaways.co.uk](http://www.dfdsseaways.co.uk)) is a cheap and cheerful two hour crossing and a four to five-hour drive to reach Ettringen/Mayen.

### Gear

A good selection of cams, big 'uns if you want to go off-width hunting, and a few nuts, 14 to 16 quickdraws and a 60m sport rope. Tape/gloves may be useful too.

### Guidebook

The very informative and comprehensive *Schwarze Säulen' – Climbing Guidebook Mayen* by Alexander Schmalz-Friedberger published by Geoquest, 2013. Grades are in German, so try to familiarise yourself with the conversion before you go. This can be bought in the petrol station and from some of the bars in Ettringen town itself or ordered online at: [www.geoquest-verlag.de](http://www.geoquest-verlag.de) There is also a dedicated bouldering guide to the Kottenheimer Winfield area, *Eifel en bloc* by Michael Gerritzen and Ralf Lehmann.

### Accommodation

There aren't any camp sites in the immediate vicinity but there are plenty of hotels or self-catering options in the Mayen area. Tourist information for Mayen: [www.mayenzeit.de](http://www.mayenzeit.de) or email: [touristinfo@mayenzeit.de](mailto:touristinfo@mayenzeit.de)

It is possible to stay overnight in a campervan in Ettringen Lay car park when it's quiet, as long as you are discreet.

### Shopping

Mayen has everything you'll need with supermarkets on the outskirts of town. Ettringen has a convenience store with most essentials. There is also a petrol station, a bakery and a couple of nice bars that do good food.

### Rest Days

Mayen is an attractive historic town, with the 700-year old Genoveva castle, plenty of shops and restaurants and even a Chesterfield-style 'leaning tower' on St Clement's Church. There are public swimming baths with a lovely outdoor pool complex. There is the Lacher See nearby (the largest crater lake/caldera in central Europe), with a Benedictine Abbey and a volcanic museum.

### Warning

Little did we know that tick repellent is needed, we found one or two crawling up our clothing but our dogs were infested. Not nice and worth guarding against.

### Season

All year round but spring to autumn is best.



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by Stefan Glowacz





Ethan Walker.

Photo: David Simmonite

**So, where you were born and where and when did you start climbing?**

I was born in Mansfield and have lived pretty much my entire life in a random little boring village that no one has hardly ever heard of, South Normanton. I started my outdoor and climbing pursuits at a very early age, sometime around four years old. My dad has always been into the outdoor life and he was the one that got me into it all. Unlike most youngsters these days, my first experience of climbing was outside on real rock. The crags of Black Rocks and Willersley were the places I grew up and began learning the ropes. Black Rocks will always be a special spot for me and a place I'll continue to keep returning. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have parents that brought me up in the outdoors and who encourage me in a sport that wasn't considered the norm at the time. I'll always be super grateful for that, not to mention being thankful for living on the borders of the Peak District.

**Was climbing 'just another sport' when you were young or were you immediately bitten by the climbing bug?**

Honestly I was that young at the time I don't really recall what it was that initially got me hooked. It was just

# Ethan Walker

Ethan Walker has come into the limelight in the last couple years for repeating both hard sport and trad routes across the White and Dark Peak (up F8c and E9). Ethan's involvement with bouldering competitions has resulted in podium places but his main focus has been on outdoor bouldering where he's knocked off some of the Peak's top-end limestone test-pieces (up to 8B). Most recently, Ethan was awarded the Best Climbing Blogger in the Trespass Blog Awards. A route setter as well as a sponsored climber, Ethan firmly sits within the latest cohort to join the ranks of the modern professional climber. Climber sent Keith Sharples to interview Ethan.

something we'd go and do after school and at the weekends. I loved being out in the woods and amongst the rocks and even though I loved most sports growing up I was never brilliant at them in school, apart from maybe running and athletics. Climbing definitely seemed to come naturally to me.

**Most climbers take inspiration from routes they see or hear about as well as climbing heroes. Did you draw inspiration from climbs/climbers that you saw or was there something else that sparked your interest?**

During my early climbing years if you'd have asked me who my climbing hero was I probably wouldn't have had a clue how to answer. Growing up, Ben Moon was the obvious big climber that everyone knew, but apart from him I reckon I would have struggled to name anyone else. Nowadays most youngsters will rattle off a bunch of wads without a second thought, but I put this down to how much more popular and accessible climbing has become. I remember High Tor in Matlock being a big dream of mine. It is such an imposing and impressive lump of rock that any climber would be attracted to it. We'd always have to stop as we drove past to scout out the cliff face for

the little dots working their way up the sheer shield of limestone. My dad had also introduced another young lad to climbing, although much older than me, Michael Garton. He was always a big inspiration for me, knocking out big E numbers left and right. I looked up to him a lot and always loved when we got to climb together. Sadly he now no longer climbs after an unfortunate accident back in 2006. I think as I got older, into my mid teens, I started to get to know more about the best climbers in the world. Chris Sharma, Dave Graham and, of course, Steve McClure all began to crop up on my radar and I certainly drew huge inspiration from these people. Around this time internet videos were really starting to kick off and I remember one in particular that really got me psyched. The 2006 Petzl RocTrip to Millau. I must have watched this a million times and it was something that really opened my eyes to the amazing places there are to go climbing around the world, as well as the life of the professional climber.

**Who did you climb with early on and how did that go?**

For a good portion of my climbing life it has just been me and my dad. I'd take a friend or two from school out occasionally



but there was never a peer group so to speak. When I got to about 14/15 I started to head out with a couple of guys from my local wall. Climbing with these had a huge affect on my climbing. It was my first experience of really knowing how to push myself and with it, of course, came the friendly competition which really helped to drive me on further.

**At what stage did you get a sense that it was going well? Was there a specific moment that went especially well and you thought you could be pretty good at climbing?**

Early on there were one or two routes. The first was a little VS hidden in the depths of Matlock called *Big Pig* (now graded HVS) and then a few years later climbing my first E1 at the same crag. I remember being incredibly proud and over the moon with both these climbs. All of a sudden I had reached the promised land and heady heights of the magic E grade. Thinking about it some more, there was probably two other climbs in particular when I suddenly began to realise that maybe I wasn't too shabby. *Twin Cam* at Stanage, a classic E4 and my first of the grade, and then a couple of years later my first F8a at Raven Tor, the classic boulder route, *Baby Chimes*, which was my first proper taste of projecting. To say I was psyched when I finally clipped the belay, would have been an understatement. After doing *Chimes* was when I really started to get stuck into hard sport climbing properly. I had learned how to try hard and started to find that confidence and desire to really push myself.

**As a young climber now, you're perhaps the second generation that has grown up with bespoke climbing walls being widely available. Were you a regular visitor to climbing walls in your early days?**

The first wall I visited was Nottingham Climbing Centre. I used to love going, it was always a real treat. The smell when you walked through the doors: of chalk, sweat and the greasy chip cobs being served in the cafe upstairs was always amazing and super exciting. I was never a regular visitor to indoor walls, my dad would take me and my brother outdoors come rain or shine. There would always be somewhere dry. Going climbing indoors was a rarity for us. You could say that I had a fairly isolated early climbing career, we'd tend to be keeping ourselves to ourselves. It wasn't until we started heading to places like Raven Tor on a more regular basis that I really started to get into the whole 'climbing scene'. It was a little intimidating



**My philosophy with climbing has always been to be the best I can be in every aspect of the sport**

at first but it did the world of good for my climbing. Hanging out with different people and folk that were so much stronger was super encouraging and really spurred me on.

**Let's get on to training next so can tell us how you structure your climbing and training today?**

During the sport/boulder season, if I have a project on the go, I find that one day on, one day off works quite nicely. If I'm not working on anything specific then two days on, one off. It can vary so much but building those rest days into your climbing is mega important for recovery.

Just one day of pure rest can make you feel invincible the day after. It's weird how it works. My training can vary depending on the time and what my current goals are throughout the year. Generally I like to climb outside as much as possible and I would much rather spend a 'training day' at the crag rather than pulling on plastic. I love the feeling of coming home totally wasted after a long session, fingers tingling from loss of skin and knowing that you really gave your body a proper work-out. During the winter, on average, I'll train at the wall maybe around three times a week. ►

Ethan Walker boulders out *Famous Grouse* (Font 7c) at Burbage West in the Peak District. Photo: David Simmonite



The rest of the time I'll train at home, or attempt to climb outside. For me, there is no better training for climbing outside, than actually going climbing outside. Running laps on routes and boulders I find is the best way of getting in shape for what I want to do. It is so much more specific and tends to be a lot more fun as well.

**Have you radically overhauled your training methodologies and philosophy as you've developed and got better?**

There is no doubt that my outlook and way of training has and continues to evolve. I wouldn't say it has been totally radical, but it's more of a case of just knowing my body better now and what the best training methods are for the stuff I want to do. When I first got into training I was at a bit of a loss over what I should be doing. Now it's all so ingrained within my head, it's almost like I barely need to think about it. Which is probably a bad thing maybe but it seems to work. One thing that you could say I've radically changed, is the amount of sleep I get at night. There was a time when I'd literally have to stay up past midnight every night. Now I turn in around 10.30 and wake up around six-ish full of life, raring and ready to go. I love to see progression in what I do.

**We'd always have to stop as we drove past to scout out the cliff face for the little dots working their way up the sheer shield of limestone**

The smallest of gains gets me psyched and makes me want to keep on going more and more. It is important for me to have goals in mind when training. This could be a particular route or maybe a trip away somewhere. It definitely helps with the motivation to get up in the morning and head to the wall or knock out that extra lap, because I have to admit occasionally it can be a struggle. Of course, I would never say no to a personal coach, we all could do with the extra kick up the behind sometimes.

**The last 12 months or so has been an amazing time for you: headpoints of E9s, redpoints of F8cs, on-sights of F8a+s, a podium finish in a bouldering comp as well as Font 8b+ ticks on the blocs. Did you deliberately set out to climb such a diverse range of climbing targets or did they 'just happen'?**

My philosophy with climbing has always been to be the best I can be in every aspect of the sport. However, I have to admit that it did all come as a bit of a surprise and a lot of the climbs I've managed have 'just happened'. One minute a route or boulder will seem so far away you'd never even dream of climbing it, but then you'll randomly give it a whirl, for whatever reason, and suddenly it becomes a reality. Then you think to yourself, okay so if I can do that, then maybe, just maybe I can do this... And then it just becomes a never ending cycle. You are constantly moving your objectives up a notch and shifting the goal posts.

**Starting with your grit headpointing over the winter of 2013/14 and then moving onto the sport climbing and bouldering over the rest of the year what did all that mean to you in terms of satisfaction and enjoyment?**

Firstly, I think one of the main factors why the 13/14 grit season was so good was the weather. We had a period of such consistent conditions that everybody was getting in on the act. I think it will always be one of best periods of gritstone climbing that anyone remembers. At the start of the winter season I made a list of all the routes I wanted to do. I think being fit from all the sport climbing I'd been doing over the previous year really helped. Everything felt so much easier in comparison to pulling on dirty limestone crimps. Even though I'd made a list, I still never thought that within the space of less than a month I'd have managed *Gaia*, *Meshuga*, *End of the Affair* and *The Zone*. Pretty crazy and a whirlwind few weeks, but some of the most memorable I think I'll ever have. With my sport climbing I found myself starting to like the longer routes more. I found there was so much more scope when I stopped restricting myself to the short and gnarly stuff. As I climbed more of these 'longer' routes I naturally became fitter and fitter, which was something I had never experienced before. That provided a huge amount of satisfaction knowing I had changed my style and could now happily get on routes that were over 10m. Although I still enjoy the hard and short boulder style routes, I'd have to say that the preference these days is for the longer lines –

routes that offer the whole package. 2014 arrived and I said to myself, right you've done it with the sport and trad, now it'd be cool to step up the bouldering and see if I could reach a similar level in that. I singled out *Keen Roof* at Raven Tor as the main objective. To my complete surprise I ended up climbing it relatively quickly; my first 8B. It was probably doing this that it started to hit me more and more than something crazy was happening and my mind began to go into overdrive with the possibilities. If I could do this, then what else was I capable of?

Ethan Walker pulling onto the headwall after the crux of Mark Pretty's 2009 'instant' classic, *Call of Nature* (F8a) at Raven Tor. Reckoned to be 'soft for the grade' *Call of Nature* nevertheless required some crimping and powerful climbing so typical of the Tor. Photo: Keith Sharples





**Looking back now – and ignoring projects that are still ongoing – what have been the stand-out moments that have stayed with you from the last year or so?**

The stand-out moments, hmm, there have been so many it is near impossible for me to choose. However, if you twist my arm then some definitely stick out slightly more than others. Topping out on *Gaia* at Black Rocks has got to be up there. After looking up at that iconic block ever since I first went climbing and finally running up that finishing slab, realising that lifelong

dream, was a pretty special moment. A few years ago I could never have even dreamed of doing something like that. I'll never forget that feeling. Climbing my first F8c, *Mecca Extension*, was another very big moment. Again, just a few months or even weeks prior to this, if you'd told me I'd even be trying to redpoint a route like this I'd have probably laughed in your face. Most people have known me for loving the short boulder style routes and not being the best endurance climber. I loved every moment of the whole process and that feeling of success clipping the belay,

while totally different to topping a trad route, will stay long in the memory. When it comes to bouldering, *Dandelion Mind* is the one that really did just come out of nowhere. Looking back it is still a slight blur but the main thing I'll remember is that it was certainly one of those sends that I really tried my absolute hardest on – full burn. The final stand-out moment would have to be my return trip to Céüse last summer. To go back to a place that when I first visited in 2011 I had got totally shut down on virtually everything I tried, ►







Ethan Walker attempting *The Voyager* (Font 8b) at Burbage North. Photo: David Simmonite

to literally warming up on these routes was utterly mind-blowing. It was the best trip I've been on so far and would love to return in the future for some of the harder lines, there are so many. Five weeks of hanging out at one of the best crags in the world, with a bunch of brilliant friends and endless classic pump fests all around you, was just pure heaven.

**With regard to your on-line activities, especially your blogging, you seem 'comfortable' writing about your activities so tell us about the philosophy behind that, how they 'sit' with and perhaps complement your climbing activities?**

I originally started blogging as just a fun and easy way of keeping track of all the stuff I get up to. It wasn't until sponsors started to get involved that it started to become a little more serious and developed into this great way of connecting with the climbing public. I do really enjoy writing, it was always something I seemed to excel at throughout my time at school. While away on a trip, blog writing is a great rest day activity.

Nothing beats chilling in the morning sunshine with the laptop and a brew while you type up what's been happening. It passes the time and provides an opportunity for reflection and also gets you more psyched and fired up for the next day at the crag.

**Can you see yourself sticking to the life as a professional climber for the foreseeable future or if not, what else might you be interested in?**

Definitely for the foreseeable future I see myself carrying on with what I'm doing. Every now and then I do try to picture life without climbing and wonder what it would be like. Who knows what the actual future holds but I love what I do and at present cannot imagine doing anything else. One thing I would like to get into some more is personal coaching. It might be a bit of a cliché but passing my skills and knowledge on to others is a great way of putting something back into the sport that has given me so much.

**What are your immediate objectives and how do you see yourself developing in the future?**

While the Peak District is great, it can become occasionally a little dull at times. To be completely honest I have yet to climb much abroad at all. I can definitely see myself travelling more and more overseas throughout the coming years. It is something I really need. There are so many amazing places out there and I have yet to even begin to scratch the surface and, like all climbers, I would love to visit as many of them as possible. The list really is endless: Spain, Rocklands, Magic Wood, Kalymnos, Hueco, Yosemite, Red River Gorge, China, Norway. These are just some off the top of my head. I'd love to visit them all. I would like to keep things fun, fresh, to carry on pushing my personal limits in all aspects of the sport and continue to see just how far I can go. There are one or two long term aims in my mind that would be nice to achieve but the main focus and top priority right now has got to be travelling and experiencing more climbing destinations around the world. This year I'd really like to do something a little different. I have a couple of vague plans in the pipeline. One involves a potential little trip to Chamonix... Again somewhere I've never visited before. We'll see how that one pans out, but I'm pretty psyched for it. ■

Ethan Walker is sponsored by Mammut, 5.10, Nakd and Trek Bars, Scheckters Organic Energy and ProBalm.





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# AROUND THE BLOC

THE BEST OF  
BRITISH BOULDERING



John Hutchinson enjoying the Scottish summer with an old-school matless ascent of the classic highball of *Physical Graffiti* (f6b+) on the Home Rule Boulder, Dumbarton Rock. Photo: Jonathan Bean.



# Dumbarton Rock

by John Hutchinson

Dumbarton Rock is located at the confluence of the River Leven and the River Clyde, roughly 30 minutes drive west of Glasgow. Standing proud of the flat alluvial plain surrounding it, the rock's basalt mass dominates the view in and around its eponymous town. The Scottish Gaelic etymology of its name Dùn Breatann (meaning the fortress of the Britons), reflects its remarkably storied history as a military site. Since the 1960s, it has also acted as a stronghold of Scottish rock-climbing, where the best climbers of each generation have left their mark. One only has to consider the groundbreaking trad ascents on its spectacular North West Face of *Requiem* (E8 6b) in 1983 by Dave Cuthbertson and *Rhapsody* (E11 7a) by Dave MacLeod in 2006. Thankfully, for the more boulder inclined among us, below the tombstone-like North West Face, sits a tightly packed jumble of huge boulders. These seven proud and distinct mega-blocs offer a staggering array of around 300 boulder problems that range from humble Font 3 to the world-class standards of Font 8b+.







Caroline Ciavaldini on the pump fest of the *Mugsy Traverse* (f7b) on the Home Rule Boulder. Photo: Nadir Khan/Wild Country

Due to its convenient proximity to Glasgow, Dumbarton Rock is a great way to escape city life without really having to leave it. Its hard basalt dries very quickly after rain, so climbing is possible all-year-round, though conditions can make or break a session. Due to its smooth skin and the variable conditions imposed by its tidal location, friction at Dumbarton Rock is very changeable and only occasionally exceptional. Its dark basalt is fractured in nature, resulting in diagonally sloping holds and incut crimps aplenty. It's not an easy rock to read from below and it requires oodles of body tension, power and sound technique to unlock. Combine its gritty semi-urban surroundings with its hard and often highball climbing and it can be an intimidating place on first acquaintance. Persevere though and it will make you a better and braver climber. You'll also come to realise that along with the grit comes grandeur and if you catch it at the right moment it can be a place of secluded and stunning beauty.

### The Tour

Thankfully, Dumbarton Rock's mega-blocs didn't fall far as they calved off the main face around 10,000 years ago, resulting in a wonderfully compact climbing venue. Due to this, it's easy to tailor your session to how you feel, or how conditions are on the day. Whether you decide to go for a Font-esque circuit of multiple easier problems, project something desperate, or get the adrenaline flowing with some highballs, Dumby has it all in one place. The first boulder encountered on arrival at Dumbarton Rock is the huge mass of the Eagle Boulder, with its distinctive ship's prow arête incising the sky. The wall to the right of this prow is home to Pete Greenwell's 1978 uber classic *Gorilla* (f6b+). Requiring strong fingers to go from two small crimps to a good layaway, the next big span left to a good jug brings the infamous gorilla swing to match and an exciting rock-over to finish up the easy slab above; ridiculously good fun and not to be missed. Taking the prow direct is Dave MacLeod's *Silverback* (f7c), which involves desperate clamping to a

**It's not an easy rock to read from below and it requires oodles of body tension, power and sound technique to unlock**

do or die backwards lunge for a good spike; either hold the almost horizontal swing or land face first in the greenery. The king of the swingers, however, is MacLeod's *King Kong* (f8a), which links up *Neil's Extension* (f7b+), *Silverback* (f7c) and *Gorilla Warfare* (f7a) to provide a long, powerful and pumpy monster.

Walk 20 paces beyond the Eagle Boulder and you're at the warm-up wall. As the name suggests, this is the best place to warm-up due to its relative shortness and amenable problems, so it's also a good place to start if you're a first timer. For beginners the smooth

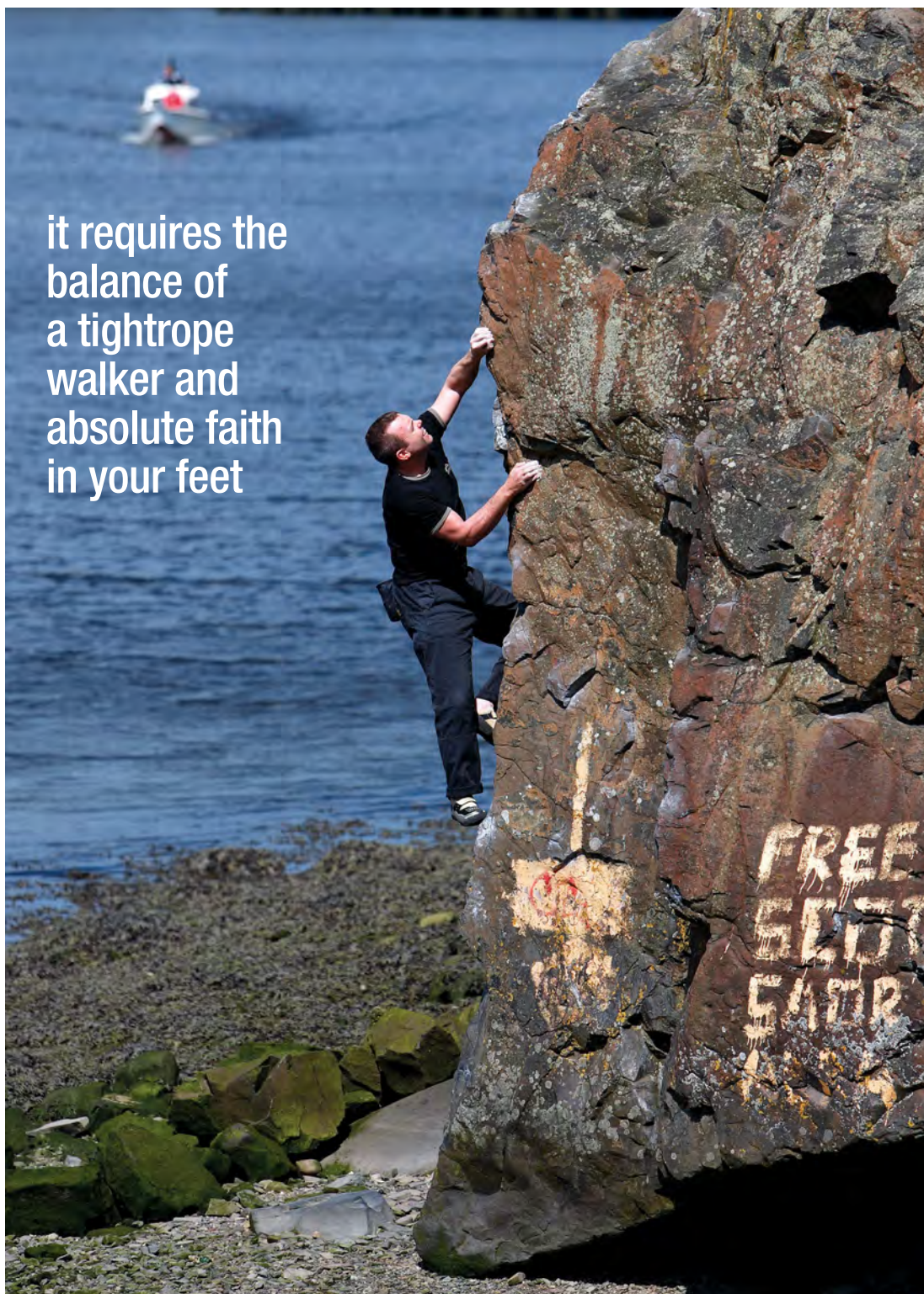




stepped groove and ledges of *Friar's Mantel* (f4+) and the more fingery wall of *Ungava* (f4) provide an ideal introduction to the smooth basalt. Another good spot to warm up is the Sea Boulder (as long as the tide is out) which although smaller in stature than the mega-blocs provides some great problems. The seaward arête of *Erewhon* (f5+) has a puzzling, water-polished start to a fine finish and the slightly more amenable but airy arête of *Steptoe* (f4) will get the heart pumping.

For Dumby novitiates there is a clutch of old-school British 6as that provide a great initiation to its dark arts. The scooped wall on Sucker's Boulder is home to the distinctive slanting crack of Gary Latter's 1985 masterpiece *Toto* (f6a+). From a tricky start on polished rock, it requires the balance of a tightrope walker and absolute faith in your feet; ye of little faith will be spat off without remorse. Just up and right from *Toto*, slants the brilliant ramp traverse of *Railing* (f6b+), which is a great lesson in body tension and sticking those Dumby slopers. Another British 6a classic,

it requires the balance of a tightrope walker and absolute faith in your feet



*Mestizo* (f6a+), climbs the technical left arête of the *Home Rule* Boulder to gain an exciting and subtle finish up the top groove. The fantastic *Mestizo Sit Start* (f7a+) adds some hard compression moves straight off the deck to complete this great line.

On the same boulder, *Home Rule* (f6a), provides another lesson in Dumby non-friction and trusting your feet to gain a good handrail to an easy but exposed top out. The big slab at the top of this boulder has to be one of the best

spots at Dumby to sunbathe and take in the view, or gaze up in awe at the spectacular main face. Be warned though, the down climb from this boulder which reverses *The Beast* (f3+) catches people out with amusing regularity. The Eagle Boulder is home to other classics around the same grade such as *2HB* (f6a+) which features a tricky crux undercut move at half-height to a fun finish on thank-god jugs. At the top end of the British 6as has to be *Good Nicks* (f6b) on the B.N.I. Boulder. ►

John Dunne boulders out *Erewhon* (f5c) on the Sea Boulder. Photo: David Simmonite





▲ Chris Prescott climbs *Cheddar Direct* (f4) on the front face of the Pongo Boulder. Photo: Nadir Khan/Wild Country

*Malky* (f7b+) on the Home Rule Boulder. James Pearson sets up for the throw to a sloping ledge. Photo: Nadir Khan/Wild Country ►

Starting in an old peg crack below the steep hanging slab above, it's a test of finger strength to match a distant crimp on the slab's edge to then pull over and finish tentatively at height. Your initiation is now complete.

If you're a highball specialist you've come to the right place. The high but steady *Impostor Arête* (f3+) and *Pendulum* (f4) are a good way to get your head into brave mode (falling is not an option) before tackling some more serious propositions. To ramp it up a bit, head on over with mats and spotters in tow to the high vertical wall of *Physical Graffiti* (f6b+) which features superlative moves on good edges, or the Eagle Boulder's excellent overhanging crack of *Supinator* (f6b), with its heart racing top-out. If you've still not had enough fear then the terrifying groove of *The Whip* (f5+/E2 5b) or the technical and bold foray of *Route Royale* (f6a/E3 5c) should satiate your adrenaline thirst for the day. Do all of these and you've definitely earned your Dumbly highball stripes.

If you're after some harder and less scary stuff to go at, a good base is the grossly overhanging face of the Pongo Boulder. Split by an immense crack from bottom to top, the springy jump start of *Pongo* (f6c+) is aptly named and hard for the grade. *Pongo Sit Start* (f8a), climbed by legendary Scottish powerhouse Malcolm Smith in 1994, was Scotland's first Font 8a and retains its aura of difficulty; a truly awesome line. An easier and worthwhile variation is *Pongo Arête* (f7a+), which starts in the same spot as the sit start, but breaks right to the arête then back left to rejoin the crux 'robo-clamp' move of *Pongo*.

Also not to be missed on this face is the three-move wonder that is Andy Gallagher's brilliantly exasperating *Slap Happy* (f7a).

Another good spot to camp yourself below is the Mugsy Face on the Home Rule Boulder, where a clutch of excellent problems start at various points along the lip of the large cave. Here lie two Andy Gallagher 90s test pieces that will greatly improve your power endurance and hone your technique. *Mestizo Traverse* (f7b) follows the cave lip from left to right and gains the Mestizo arête via a tricky move. The slightly burlier Mugsy Traverse (f7b), starts at the same point but then breaks up the face midway to join the original problem of Mugsy (f7a). If you're successful on these, then there's a bewildering array of worthwhile link-ups and variations on this face to keep you busy, so be sure to take an up-to-date guide along.

It's also worth noting that Dumbarton has some excellent low-level traverses for building sport climbing fitness and power endurance. The finest of these is *Consolidated* (f7b+), though *1990 Traverse* (f7b), *Dressed for Success* (f7b+) and *Shattered Traverse* (f7a+) are all worthwhile pump-fests. It's not always obvious what holds are in or out though, so best to ask a local. For those operating in the upper grades, be sure not to miss out on Dave Macleod's *Sabotage* (f8a) which tackles the roof of the B.N.I. boulder, an exercise in raw power and devious

## FACT FILE

### Guidebooks

For guidebooks, look no further than John Watson's excellent, exhaustive *Dumbly Bloc* (Stone Country Press), and Jonathan Bean's lovingly crafted website [Dumbly.info](http://Dumbly.info) which features downloadable PDF topos.

### Camping and Accommodation

There are no camp sites in or around Dumbarton but plenty around nearby Loch Lomondside. If you want a bit more comfort then there's a nearby Travelodge and Premier Inn amongst others. Otherwise, Glasgow is your best bet with a multitude of accommodation options from hostels, B&Bs and hotels, to a mate's couch.

### Supplies

The most convenient place to stock up on Irn Bru and other essentials is probably one of the petrol stations encountered along the A82 from Glasgow. Otherwise, there's a Co-Op on the edge of town and a huge Asda a little further along. There's also a Costa Coffee and Starbucks nearby for the caffeine junkies.

technique that is considered one of the best boulder problems in the UK. It's also worth looking out MacLeod's *Sanction* (f8b) and *Pressure* (f8b) or Malcolm Smith's *Gutbuster* (f8b+) and *Firefight* (f8b+) if only to stand with mouth agape, gaze in wonder and dream. ■





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## This month there's a lot going on in Wales – help give Tremadog a spring clean

The annual Tremadog Revival Festival, affectionately known as TremFest, returns in May (29th-31st) and is your chance to help carry out essential maintenance and improvement works at Craig Bwlch y Moch and Craig Pant Ifan. There will be plenty of path clearance, boundary maintenance and route clearing to do as well as some really sensitive work to help protect rare plants. But it's not all work, and your reward for volunteering will include free camping, some free beer and prizes for all those who volunteer; we'll probably have a mystery guest speaker too. For more information see [www.thebmc.co.uk/tremfest-2015](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/tremfest-2015) Watch a video of last year's TremFest on BMC TV: [tv.thebmc.co.uk/video/bmc-tremfest-2014](http://tv.thebmc.co.uk/video/bmc-tremfest-2014)



Alan Hinkes (in light blue) and BMC president, Scott Titt (in red), getting stuck in at Tremadog.

## Peak lime gets the grit treatment

Having revolutionised the style of definitive climbing guidebooks to the gritstone crags of the Peak District, turning them into some of the most inspirational and informative climbing guides around, the BMC guidebook team, headed by Niall Grimes, has turned its attention to the white stuff and the publication of the first definitive guidebooks to Peak District limestone in over 30 years. The first volume of the series, *Peak Limestone North* is imminent – it may even be out by the time you read this. Amongst the crags covered are: Chee Dale; Water-cum-Jolly; Stoney Middleton; Horseshoe Quarry; Raven Tor; Smalldale and Harpur Hill. It's bound to create a surge of interest in crags and routes that in recent years perhaps haven't seen the attention they deserve.



## Make the move outside with New Rock Climbers

You've done some indoor climbing and want to try climbing outdoors on real rock? But the boulders and cliffs present many new challenges not experienced indoors. Fear not, our new booklet will help you get to grips with climbing outside. *New Rock Climbers* contains advice on how to try climbing outside; specific chapters on bouldering, trad climbing and sport climbing, as well as related skills such as abseiling and advice and information on clubs, young climbers and emergency procedures. Download a free copy from the BMC website at [www.thebmc.co.uk/new-rock-climbers](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/new-rock-climbers) or order a printed copy from the BMC online shop at [www.bmcshop.co.uk](http://www.bmcshop.co.uk).

## Join us in North Wales – AGM 2015

Every year the BMC hosts a weekend get-together based around its AGM. This year's BMC AGM will take place on Saturday 25th April at Plas y Brenin, North Wales. Why not make a weekend of it and enjoy all that Snowdonia has to offer. There will be plenty of time for climbing and socialising. We will also be holding the bi-annual BMC Clubs Seminar at Plas y Brenin over the AGM weekend. Find out more at [www.thebmc.co.uk/agm2015](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/agm2015)

## Pembroke: time to get briefed

Pembroke's Range West holds some of the best limestone sea-cliffs in the world, but to gain access to them, you need to attend one of the official briefings held at Castlemartin Army Camp. They only take 40 minutes and then you're set for a wealth of adventures on Range West. Once briefed, climbers can access the range on all non-firing days until Easter 2016. The remaining 2015 briefing dates are: **Thursday 23rd April** (18.00); **Thursday 21st May** (18.00); **Saturday 23rd May** (10.00). For more information, see [www.thebmc.co.uk/pembroke-time-to-get-briefed](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/pembroke-time-to-get-briefed)



The 2013 BMC International Meet was held on the golden granite of Cornwall. Photo: Nick Wallis.



## BMC Area Meetings

Area meetings are run by volunteers and are your chance to join in with debate, influence decisions and get involved in the work of the BMC. The next meetings are:

Peak	Wednesday 15th April, 7.30pm	The Maynard, Grindleford
Yorkshire	Monday 20th April, 7.30pm	The Wheatley Arms, Ben Rhydding
Lakes	Wednesday 22nd April, 7.30pm	Lakeland Climbing Centre, Kendal
South West	Thursday 23rd April, 7.00pm	Nova Scotia Hotel, Bristol
South Wales	Saturday 23rd May, 7.30pm	Pembroke – venue to be confirmed
North Wales	Tuesday 2nd June	Location and venue to be confirmed
Midlands	Wednesday 3rd June, 8.00pm	Old Edwardians Sports Club, Solihull

For more information see [www.thebmc.co.uk/upcoming-bmc-area-meetings](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/upcoming-bmc-area-meetings)

## The world comes to Wales

North Wales will feel like the United Nations of rock-climbing when the Llanberis Pass becomes the base for the 2015 BMC International Summer Climbing Meet, from 10th to 17th May. The aim of the meet is to showcase the uniqueness of British climbing and its ethics and traditions, along with fostering international relationships. During the week approximately 30 international guests from up to 25 countries will be teamed up with British host climbers to go climbing. Past Meets have attracted climbers not only from Europe but from as far away as Japan, South Africa, India, Pakistan, China, Canada, America, Israel, New Zealand and Iran. The International Meet is held annually and alternates between a summer rock-climbing meet and a winter mountaineering meet.

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## Statement: The Ben Moon Story

by Ed Douglas  
Vertebrate Publishing £20

This new biography tells the remarkable story of the highly respected climber Ben Moon. It is the result of meticulous research by Ed Douglas who spent many hours discussing climbing and life with Ben and talking to Ben's family and friends. *Statement* describes how, at a young age, Ben found climbing, and how his love for the powerful emotions he experienced was instantaneous. At that time he thought nothing would ever match the strong feelings and sensations that movement and shape on rock gave him. Ben was brought up in Kingston Upon Thames. His grandfather, Jack, shared his passion for climbing. He explained to Ben that the climbing of his day was all about being part of an enthusiastic group of all levels of climbing ability, and simply appreciating the joy of sharing the mountains. Ben loved Jack's tales of these pioneering days. Their private world of climbing dreams was like a rope that would always bind them together.

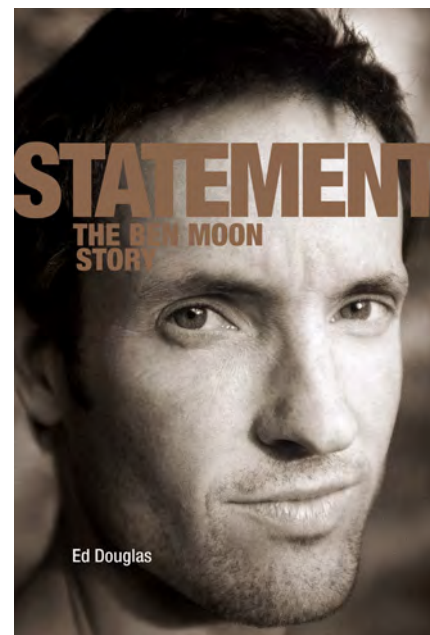
Ben's father, Jeremy, was an abstract painter and his mother, Beth, was a full-time mum. He had an elder brother, Rob, and a younger sister, Georgina. One day in November 1973 the family were informed that Jeremy had been involved in an accident on his motorbike and was recovering in Kingston Hospital. Beth and Jeremy's brother, David, quickly went to visit him but by the time they arrived at the hospital Jeremy was dead. Ben was left with 'fragments and ghosts of memories' and Beth was left with three young children to guide through life. Ben attended Christ Hospital School where he pretty much conformed to what was expected of him, but he did help to form the band Bash Street Kids, whose lead singer was Jason Flemyng, later to star in the films *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*. Ben loved groups like Crass and The Damned and modelled himself on Mark Wilson of The Mob. He grew dreadlocks, he looked a bit punkish and alternative but his thoughts were always channelled through rock rather than words. He took his O Levels and recalls that as he did so, he received a letter from Jack telling him of the sad loss of two of Britain's finest climbers, Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker, on Everest. It was 1982.

Ed Douglas delights in cataloguing Ben's significant contribution to sport climbing in the 1980s. Sport climbing was a relatively new, an intriguing form of movement which embraced the use of permanent anchors and even bolts for protection. The myths of climbing would suggest

that it threatened to stifle traditional climbing but Ed reassures the reader that this was not true. The use of bolts did perhaps disturb some of the perceived climbing establishment but rocking the climbing establishment was what each generation of new climbers did. Ben used bolts on one of his first major routes called *Statement of Youth*. Some thought this name was a small rebellion but the route was actually named by Mark Pretty, and was a pun on the title of Vera Brittain's memoir, *Testament of Youth*.

Sport climbing was a revolution and climbers like Ben and Jerry Moffatt were impatient to discover what the human body could achieve when the spectre of fear was removed. In *Statement*, Ed clearly pinpoints the keys to the stunning acceleration of the standards in this form of climbing. Ben had the greatest respect for some of his closest foreign rivals including Wolfgang Gullich, the Le Menestrel brothers and Jibé Tribout. At this time in his climbing development he felt he was always trying to catch up with these climbing greats. All climbing was moving towards being more professional and was losing its persona of being a 'counter cultural lifestyle'. The future was professionalism and sponsorship. In France, Ben created two new routes called *Agincourt* and *Maginot Line* and in 1990 he completed *Hubble* on Raven Tor, which at the time was the hardest sport climbing route in the world. It was given the grade F8c+ but is considered today to have been the first ever F9a route. Ben reflects, 'It is from climbing I draw my inspiration for life'. Adam Ondra wrote of *Hubble*, '... it is of revolutionary difficulty for its time...' And Steve McClure wrote, 'It was the ultimate bench mark. It then gained a reputation over the years, it never became easier...'

Ben never allowed himself to be satisfied with his achievements. He always looked for new training regimes and ways of improving the balance between power and endurance and ways to concentrate his motivation and focus. All these aspects of his life would enrich his ability to move on rock. Around his 30th birthday Ben took time out from climbing to allow his battered body to recover and when he came back he saw bouldering as his future. Bouldering was fast and gave immediate rewards and it was just what Ben was looking for. Bouldering was not better than sport climbing, it was just different. Bouldering was quality climbing without the hassle. In 2002 Ben started his second company which he simply called Moon,



selling a range of equipment and T-shirts. Ben married his partner Jo and their daughter Sylvie was born in 2009. Looking for another challenge Ben completed a bouldering project called *Voyager*. He then worked on making it more difficult and a few months after his 40th birthday he made the first and only ascent of *Voyager Sit Start*. It was given a bouldering grade of 8B+ and is still one of the hardest routes in the UK.

*Statement* is an enthralling read, beautifully written by Ed Douglas. It very clearly describes Ben's relationship with sport climbing and bouldering, his ambition to paint abstract pictures on enticing rock and his ability to produce balletic, complex movement in order to fulfil his dreams. Ed's writing is empathetic and warm. He obviously has the greatest admiration for Ben and what he has achieved. The text is engaging and informative and reflects just how sport climbing and bouldering have influenced a whole generation of climbers. This book is not a light read but it is a very rewarding one. It is a fine testament to Ben and to Jerry Moffatt that, even today, the best climbers struggle to repeat their pioneering routes and puzzle as to how so much was achieved during this remarkable period. In *Statement*, Ed Douglas describes how the theatre of sport climbing and bouldering evolved and how these new gymnastic challenges on rock inspired so many. Sport climbing and bouldering produced a small group of new climbing masters, and Ben Moon was certainly one of the best.

Noel Dawson



# Swanage

The Climbers' Club £22.50

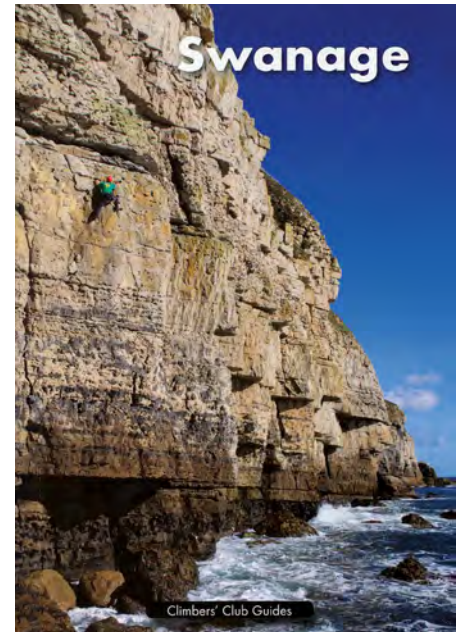
The south coast of England not only has some of the most varied rock-climbing around but it also enjoys some of the best weather as well. Not surprising then that it is popular with both 'locals' and with those travelling down from 'up north' to grab themselves some sun-rock action. Swanage is but one section of the south of England coastline – but it's an important one at that, not least because of the most of the crags are within the area known as the Jurassic Coast, England's first World Heritage Site. In addition, the guide also features the limited and somewhat esoteric climbing on the Isle of Wight.

Strangely considering the maturity of the crags today, the interest and hence development of the Swanage cliffs didn't really kick off properly until quite late. Leaving aside the activities of the American Ranger Battalion who 'used' Boulder Ruckle as preparation for their assault on Omaha Beach during the Second World War, the proper climbing development didn't get under way until the 60s. As the guide notes, there was a psychological barrier to the climbing on account of the intimidating nature of the climbing as well as loose rock, this, more than the technical difficulties of the climbing, acted as a strong deterrent. Nevertheless, development continued with some strong 'local' characters leading the way. Fast forward to the present day and the transformation is little short of amazing. Alongside the traditional climbing at the well-known trad honey-pots of Boulder Ruckle there is the thoroughly modern – and monster – cave action at Blackers Hole and The Palace (of the Brine) as well as the superb DWSing at Conner Cove and the sport/trad mix at places like The Promenade. The mix of trad and sport climbing isn't unique at Swanage – many places have had similar 'agreements' established by local climbers – but as with other such areas it give great opportunities to mix things up a bit for locals as well as visitors alike.

The new guide to Swanage from The Climbers' Club is especially welcome as it's been 20 years or so since the last guide, a double edition also covering Portland, to the area by the Club. The latest edition to Swanage is crammed with all the facts and beta that you'll need. It looks and feels like a thoroughly modern guide and despite having nearly 500 pages is still sufficiently compact that it can be carried on routes – if needed. As with many sea cliff areas, access to the Swanage crags tends to be more complex and the guide deals with this well giving OS reference points, detailed maps and QR codes for the parking – all very modern and something with which the CC are leading the way. Another really nice touch to help access is that a photo – often thumbnail size – is included within the access notes as well so first-time visitors have the additional benefit of a visual check as they approach the crags. Detailed route topogs accompany the route descriptions. The crag photos are worth mentioning as they have been taken from the sea and they're little short of works of art in themselves. Route grades are given depending upon whether the route is trad, sport or DWS. In addition, V grades are given for the bouldering. Where sport routes are being described, the number of bolts are also included although the guide (rightly) warns that these numbers may change. First ascent dates accompany the routes so routes can be cross-referenced with the first ascent details which are given in the back of the guide in the form of a chronology. Interestingly, various commentary textual passages have been included within the first ascent details relating to relevant pertinent/historic points. This is a rather nice idea as it not only breaks up the first ascent lists but it (arguably) eliminates the need for a separate historical section – hence saving space.

As usual, there are action shots as well, in this instance plenty, in fact. In all but a couple of instances these are excellent and serve to both illustrate the climbing and inspire visitors. My favourite shot is the opening double-page spread on the title page of Tom Randall on the upper section of *Infinite Gravity* (F8a+) at Blackers Hole taken by Mike Hutton. It's a cracking image showing the exposed and intimidating nature of the climbing and the route yet it's inspirational as well – you can almost taste the salt in your mouth. The CC must be congratulated on the guide, it's a thoroughly competent looking addition and for £22.50 what's not to like.

Keith Sharples



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what are you doing?

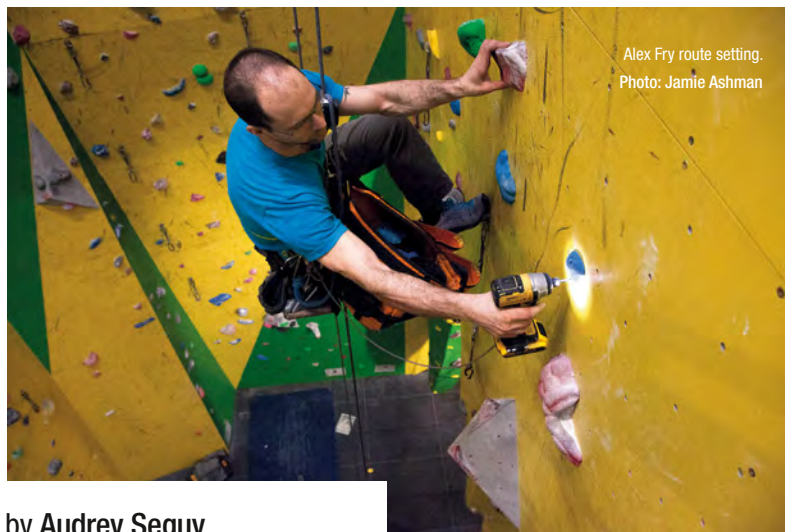


## Setting the standard

When I started working for The Castle in 2001, indoor climbing was in its adolescence. Definitely past its infancy, when it was looking up to the grown up world of outdoor climbing, but not yet the confident 20something ready to take on the world. Yes, it was more of a teenager, starting to push boundaries, full of hope and wonder, but sometimes wallowing in self-misery. Now, obviously, indoor climbing is a fully fledged, paid-up member of the sporting community. Faced with our increasing participation figures few would question anymore whether indoor climbing is 'real' climbing, the debate has blown past that point. Perhaps, no single aspect highlights this coming of age so much as route setting.

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The Castle Climbing Centre.  
Photo: Ben Grubb



Alex Fry route setting.  
Photo: Jamie Ashman

by Audrey Seguy

The Castle, over the years, has gained a reputation as having great quality routes and blocs. In an increasingly competitive environment, this is essential because it's our core product, it's what our customers want. Yes, good music, scrummy home-made cakes and proper coffee are nice, but ultimately people come to The Castle to climb. So how do we keep up the quality? Well, we're one of the few centres that employ a full-time setting manager. Mike Langley, who's no climbing slouch himself, heads a team of 30 setters and assistants, manages the tricky logistics of working in our labyrinthine building and presides over the constant renewal and development of our walls and the setting.

set back then. And the tags. Don't get me started on the tags. Someone, somewhere thought it would be a good idea to identify boulder problems by using tags with pictures on them. So you could climb the cat problem, which couldn't overlap the squirrel one which could also look like the fox one. Numbers weren't that helpful either. Try looking for the next 53 foothold while teetering on a slab with number 35 in your face. Or was it 51 that you were doing? Anyway, it's kind of funny looking back on it now.

At that time, indoor climbing was still very much linked to climbing outdoors. No one would ever admit in public that they enjoyed climbing on plastic. So, like outdoors, routes were given English tech grades (that's the second bit that starts with number, the 4c in VS 4c). We didn't know what to do with the boulder problems so we gave those English tech grades too and, just like outdoors, routes were given names. This was considered a perk of setting. You could leave your mark. Show everyone how clever you were. Let them into the labyrinth of your mind or leave subtle clues about how to work out the crux move. Or just write the name of the song that was playing when you were setting. Needless to say, it got old quickly. Also, in retrospect, giving angry young men (it was, and still is, mostly men who set) free rein to name routes was never going to work out.

As we got bigger and busier things had to change – and they did. Sometimes slowly, sometimes fast. We ditched the English grades, briefly using a dual grade system and, finally, adopted French sport grades for routes. With the bouldering, a foray into B grades and Font grades ended with us settling on V grades, although even this is not without its problems. We've had to make up some easier grades (VB = V Basic and V0-) for the low end.

Back in the day (ah, did I really write that) setting was done using hex keys by anyone with a bit of climbing experience in exchange for free climbing. Our rate was two routes or 10 boulder problems for one month's climbing. Bargain. Some months the routes got set, sometimes they got... well, you know other stuff came up and the weather was too nice to stay indoors. Sometimes the old routes and boulder problems were stripped and cleaned and sometimes you'd find an odd hold from a problem that had been set a year back still on the wall.

Between shifts, I washed holds by hand, using wire brushes and toothbrushes to get into the nooks and crannies. Good thing that we didn't have too many routes to



We dropped the tags and moved to monochromatic setting. Most Europeans take this for granted, but back in the US and Canada many gyms still swear by using strips of tape pointing to the holds: "It like limits your creativity if you can only use one colour, man" I heard from some American setters. Whatever, their setters must just not be good enough or their hold selection might be a bit rubbish. We saw that less is more and instead of trying to get 40 blocs out of one area, it was better to get 30 quality blocs and to change them more frequently.

We moved on from the hex keys to ratchets to drills (no more setter's elbow and repetitive strain injuries in the wrist... yay) to impact drivers. While the latter is now the norm for setting, there's no question that they are very loud and disruptive, so hopefully this too will evolve. Our safety procedures too have gone through plenty of iterations, each time looking at how we can keep setters safe in a practical way. New equipment is constantly coming out on the market for us to test and review. What could once be managed from a spreadsheet became increasingly complex and we now have a bespoke database to work out the route allocations each month. And the most important change? We began paying the setters... with real money. At some point along the way we realised that it wasn't good enough to just get a keen punter in to spray some holds on the wall and give his ego a boost watching others flail. Not good for business, you know? So we banned setting for free climbing (you can still come and wash holds for free climbing, though). We were now paying people and expecting a higher standard. And the same story was repeating itself across the country. A new class of worker was born, the professional route setter.

The Castle is the biggest single site employer of setters in the UK and quite possibly one of the biggest in the world with a team of 30 working on a regular basis. Not only is our centre very big (and growing), but we also have an frenzied reset schedule. How big are we? One hundred and ten route lines put us in with the big boys, but it's the additional 10 bouldering areas and four traverse walls that make us stand out. So that's (currently) 423 routes, 310 boulder problems and 26 traverses. Routes are reset on average every three to four months and one entire bouldering area is reset each week, giving us nearly 150 new routes and 200 new blocs each month. In other words, you could climb every day and always find something new. Or, to use the latest measure of climbing, each month we set 2.6 times the height of Dawn Wall (that's 2,380m in total).

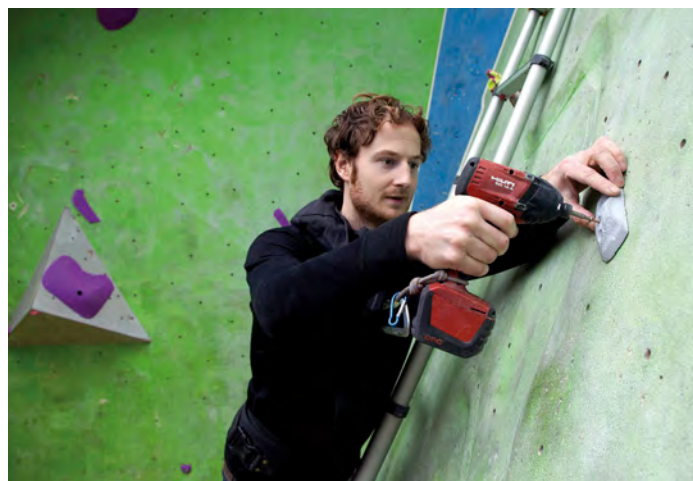


To exacerbate the challenge of the sheer volume of setting, we have the logistics imposed by our unique building. There are five levels of indoor climbing in addition to the outdoor climbing. Around 5,000 holds are taken off, washed and put back on the wall each and every month. We estimate that we currently have 24,000 holds in the building, split amongst 85 sets that are distributed in four different route setting areas. And each area needs to be well-stocked because if you need to hunt around for a drill bit you'll be going up and down more than 250 steps before you've visited each route setting store room.

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In the Engine House alone, there are 101 steps between the Loft bouldering areas at the very top and the hold washing area and store room at the very bottom. Which is why when building the new climbing areas, we insisted on a small lift to move the holds (unfortunately, it's too small for the setters).

This just amplifies the physical demands of the job. Bags of holds can weigh around 40kg and these need to be carried between the washing, storage and climbing areas. They need to be hauled up the routes. And although setters don't have to be the best climbers, in the realm of professional setting, a minimum standard is expected. Alex Fry, who has been setting at walls



around the country full-time for the last 10 years, aims to maintain a personal level of climbing F8a on routes and V9 on boulders to be effective as a setter. He has to plan his training around his work schedule. "Some boulder sets can work as training sessions if I want them to. What I find I do more and more these days is two-handed finger boarding as, generally speaking, my fingers are not that tired, (particularly after route days), but my body is pretty tired. The hardest thing is that testing is normally too hard to be a rest day but not hard enough for a training session so in of itself setting is not enough and you still need to train, but you're normally tired and just want to leave the wall." At the very top levels of setting, international competition setters like Jamie Cassidy have to plan their work carefully to make time to train so that they're climbing at a high level themselves for the comps they are scheduled to set at.

Some setters think that it's the physical nature of the work that puts women off becoming professional setters. At the moment there are only a handful who find work beyond their local wall. ►

Top: Kornelija Howick, in-house setter and competition organiser.  
Photo: Mike Langley

Above: The Castle's setting manager, Mike Langley.  
Photo: Jamie Ashman



Some of this is just due to the fact that there are fewer women who climb and, in time this will probably change. Kornelija Howick, one of the few female setters, thinks that it's mostly because of stereotypes and perceptions. "The fact that few girls choose to do setting for a living is related to stereotypes and people's perceptions, one of the main ones being that you have to climb as hard as your male colleagues." She explains that: "While being a strong climber is a very important aspect of setting, 'strong' should be defined by the expectations of the set you have to do... unless one needs to set men's World Cup Finals there is definitely a place for a female route setter that does not climb V13 at many climbing wall sets."

But can anyone become a setter? Gav Symonds, a nationally recognised setter with 12 years' experience, thinks that the most important quality is being a good climber which he identifies as: "Not climbing V12... but knowing what your body is doing, how the movement is working and having good technique." My own observation is that the best setters are a bit geeky and obsessive. In a good way, of course. They get excited about new holds, new materials and new tools. They watch climbers tackle their routes and learn what works, what doesn't. And while they have lots of pride in their work, they also don't take feedback personally. If you get defensive each time someone disagrees with you about a grade, you aren't going to last long in this game. The best setters

can also adapt to the wall, the holds and the target audience that they're given. While they might have a favourite style, they'll go with the flow and be able to set anything from delicate slabs to forearm-busting roof climbs.

So who do we employ to work their magic on our walls? We like to mix it up a bit with 'big names' from the UK climbing scene (think Steve McClure, Dave Barrans or Shauna Coxsey, for example), lesser known professional setters and our own in-house setters. The big names in climbing usually set the harder routes or blocs and are a bit of an attraction in themselves. Often, they get the red carpet treatment with routes already stripped and holds washed for them so that their time is spent just route setting. You could call them pro climbers, except that very few climbers can get by on sponsorship alone, so many are also setting, coaching and lecturing on the side. The problem is that setting gets in the way of training and climbing and if they're not careful they can fall off their game easily. I've known a number of competition climbers who found this out the hard way.

## To exacerbate the challenge of the sheer volume of setting, we have the logistics imposed by our unique building

They needed to set to earn money but couldn't train properly when setting so wouldn't get the results needed to break free from setting.

The emergence of the professional setters is, I think, one of the best developments in our industry. Buzzing around the many climbing centres, these guys are like worker bees helping with the cross-pollination of ideas and best practice around the country. As they work at many different centres, I always find it useful to take some time out of my day to catch up and pick their brains about all kinds of things from competition formats, to wall maintenance and customer service issues. You won't see these guys in climbing magazines (except this issue) or hear about their exploits on social media, but they've taken what was a hobby to the next level. The best of them are known for their consistency, reliability and the sheer volume they can do. We expect them to set the full grade range from F4 to F8a, VB to V8 on a wide range of angles with a variety of holds.

Finally, we've also got Castle born and bred setters, our in-house team, and though some have gone on to become professional setters, for the most part you'll only find their routes at The Castle. These setters bring something different to the table, they know The Castle and our customers and are often around to see how their routes/blocs are received.

Setting routes is still very much an individual effort, but we've adopted a team approach for the boulder sets with a team of two to three setters and sometimes an assistant. Most of the time the new blocs will be up by early afternoon, but then the real work starts and the team is expected to test every single one before grading them by consensus. This minimises the chance of spinning holds, gives greater consistency in grading and increases the quality of each set. Less experienced setters can also learn from more experienced ones to improve their own setting. This type of approach had previously only been used for competition sets, but we wanted that same quality for all of our sets.

With the growing popularity of climbing competitions, setting has been stepping into the spotlight usually reserved for the climbers. Across the pond, there are even setting competitions (don't ask me, I don't quite know how it works either). Competition setting is fundamentally different from regular setting in a number of ways. Both the routes and blocs tend to increase in difficulty rather than have a consistent level of difficulty. Comp moves can be a bit wilder and riskier than 'normal' sets. Spinning obstacles, big jumps and upside down starts are all par for the course in comps. Comp setting is high pressure. Ideally all the routes and blocs get done at least once, but not more than that. I've been on both sides and can say 100% that watching others climb my route in a national final was far more nerve-wracking than climbing in one. Once you've made your offering, it's out of your hands whether the climbers will read it right, whether they're on form or not or whether they just make a mistake. Temperature differences between setting and competition times can make the difference between blocs getting done or everyone flailing on the first move.

And now we come to the two most commonly moaned about aspects of indoor climbs: reach and grades. Outdoors, reachy routes are grudgingly put up with because there are often intermediate handholds or alternative footholds. And unless you're going to the chip the route (so not cool) you just have to put up with it. Indoors, climbers feel more aggrieved about reachy routes

Tim Maxwell (aka T-Max)  
one of the in-house setters.  
Photo: Jamie Ashman







The Castle setting bag, Gav Symonds was instrumental in designing the first (and only) purpose built setter's bag.  
Photo: Jamie Ashman

Example of setting allocation. Photo: Jamie Ashman ▼



because setters have a choice about where to put their holds. Also you have someone else to blame for not getting up the route, which is always easier to do than blame yourself. A little known fact is that most setters are not, in fact, over six feet tall. Alex, at 5'9" considers himself one of the taller setters. Good setters have all sorts of tricks to avoid setting reachy routes. Tim Maxwell, aka TMax, one of our in-house setters makes sure that he can reach all the handholds on lower grade routes with his elbow. Alex, on the other hand, focuses on footholds, with higher footholds allowing shorter climbers to do the same moves.

Setters also have a particularly difficult task because their audience is far broader than it would be outdoors and, increasingly, we're seeing a lot of super-talented young climbers wanting hard routes to train on. At the other end of the spectrum, there are many more young novice climbers too. At The Castle, we've recently introduced a children's specific bouldering circuit using holds chosen specifically with smaller hands in mind. In addition to just having the holds closer together, the setters accommodate this new demand with features like an additional row of footholds on some traverses, extra low starting handholds and finishes that don't go to the top of the wall.

As for grading, well it's obviously a completely objective process which is easy to get right (she says, her voice

dripping with sarcasm). Having circuits that are given a grade range, rather than one particular grade helps, but it's a bit of a cop-out. Ultimately, the grades, like outdoors, can only be reached by consensus when the climbs are repeated. That's why we don't consider the job done when the blocs have been put up, they need to be tested as well. We have a reputation for grades being a bit harsh. That doesn't bother me too much because I think consistency is more important. As long as a F6b is easier than a F6c and harder than a F6a then we're doing okay. Trying to calibrate it to 'benchmark' outdoor routes is ridiculous, indoor climbing is fundamentally different. The routes are generally shorter, there aren't often intermediates or alternate sequences and the holds stick out from the wall. As long as the route is good and the grade is more or less right, that works for me.

And, finally, what makes a good route or boulder problem? A good route is an aesthetic line. It's bright, clean holds that make the best use of a natural feature or volume. It has a natural start and finish. It's good value with each move bringing something to the table. It's elegant and thoughtful with each hold having purpose and with no hold being unnecessary. It makes me think, it might make me grunt, but mostly it makes me smile. And at The Castle, I'm always finding lots of new reasons to smile. ■



Gav Symonds,  
professional route setter.  
Photo: Simon Fowler

**Audrey** is the Managing Director of The Castle Climbing Centre. She led the production of the Association of British Climbing Walls' Route and Boulder Setting Guidelines in 2014.

## Setter profile: Tim Maxwell (aka T-Max)

In-house setter

Climbing for 15 years, setting for 12 years

**Frequency of setting:** 10-15 days/month

**Preferred style:** crimps and pockets, but occasionally slopers (on request)

## Setter profile: Kornelija Howick

In-house setter and competition organiser

Climbing for 10 years, setting for five years

**Frequency of setting:** two to four days/week

**Preferred style:** varied, but likes to work on the outdoors boulders, it's not often the job lets you work outside

**Fave grips:** a real holds geek, she's the one who worked out how many we have at The Castle, but won't commit to having a favourite

## Setter profile: Alex Fry

Professional setter

Climbing for 18 years, setting for 14 years (one and half years at The Castle)

**Frequency of setting:** four to five days/week for up to 12 weeks at a time

**Preferred style:** powerful, steep climbs

**Fave grips:** Volx and Core slopers and pinches

## Setter profile: Gav Symonds

Professional setter

Climbing for 20 years, setting for 12 years (eight years at The Castle)

**Frequency of setting:** currently just a couple of days a month to keep his hand in

**Preferred style:** Doesn't have a preferred style; varied climbing experience is reflected in his setting

**Fave grips:** pinches

**Fun fact:** Gav was instrumental in designing the first (and only) purpose built setter's bag (see picture)

With thanks to Kornelija Howick for compiling statistics about The Castle setting.





# trad dreaming

## From zero to... solid second

#don'trunbeforeyoucanwalk

This isn't based on hard facts, but I have a suspicion these days that many climbers feel a sense of urgency with their rate of progression, whether that's indoors or out. There are more climbers, climbing harder grades, at ever-younger ages. No surprise then that there can be pressure to climb rather too rapidly up through the grades, if for no other reason than to avoid being burnt off by the 10-year olds.

The pitfalls of being overly competitive indoors, ranging from egg on your face type embarrassment at the mild end, through to a plethora of over-pulling type injuries at the other, is one thing. But if this champing at the bit overflows onto the crags there is far more at stake. Especially if your dreams are of pristine boltless sweeps of rock where judgement and sound decision-making count for more than cranking out hard moves.

Winding back the climbing clocks for a moment, I wonder when exactly did the *itional* get dropped from *trad*? Do all new climbers even appreciate the origin? Are we in too much of a hurry to recall that *traditional* rock-climbing at one time WAS rock-climbing? So what? I hear you groan, but stay with me here, I'm not lamenting the loss of a bygone era, merely making an observation about how climbers' journeys are changing and how this can affect confidence, competence and safety.

Not so long ago your climbing apprenticeship began as you unpacked your rucksack at the base of a crag. It unfolded on routes that could be climbed instinctively and were gentle to novice fumbleings while you figured out the vagaries of making runners stay put and ropes remain untwisted. I hold my hand and acknowledge that I was one of those passionate bumbles, dithering my way up Diffs. Gaining momentum slowly, and grades incrementally, only as and when my confidence allowed. Unglamorous though that approach may be, it's a very safe one.

The base of the pyramid is broad, so by the time you're ready to push your grade or jump on something spicier, you have a myriad of honed skills to fall back on. Honed not by reps, or hangs but through the time-honoured tradition of getting out and rubbing your nose in it.

Conversely, taking weeks, months or even years worth of plastic fitness along with you on your first trad climb is a double-edged sword. Yes, you have power or stamina a plenty, but how to temper your ambitions while you learn the craft? Tricky. But the best advice would be to be patient, be humble and be realistic. Even better, be a solid second first.

### Be understood

And that brings me nicely to my first point, the confusing language of climbing. Not only is it riddled with jargon, its also clunky and old-fashioned sounding. But without it we'd be all over the shop. Antiquated though they may sound the climbing calls do work, haven't been bettered, and are here to stay. With a few variations they are also international. Yes, they are superfluous when you're on short routes, or in sight and sound of your partner. Shout what you like in this case, as long as you both know what's going on. But they are always there to fall back on when long run-outs, intricate route weaving or a whistling wind severs communication. The key is to watch and anticipate the shouts based on how far your partner has climbed,

and the pattern and rate at which you're paying out the rope. The leader will make short stops to place runners and work out moves, but will take longer to construct a belay for example.

### Be comfortable

There's no doubt that you'll concentrate better and enjoy the whole experience more if you've chosen the right gear to wear and take. This doesn't mean you have to lug up the kitchen sink just in case. The opposite, in fact. Feeling heavy and cluttered by too many extras doesn't help the climbing experience. Think less is more. The art is in having exactly what you need and not a gram over. Set off with the absolute minimum, you'll soon be weighed down with runners anyway.

Gear-wise, on a single pitch route, when you are planning to walk straight back down after, all you need is a nut key, everything else can stay at the bottom. Attach it where you can access it quickly (front right if you're right-handed), this may not seem very important on routes furnished with good ledges where you can stand comfortably to take out runners, but on steeper pitches every second counts. Think also about a streamlined system for carrying and attaching your nut key. There are some fiendishly clever systems that allow it to be attached umbilical cord-like, but in my experience they tangle easily and can be more trouble than they're worth, it might be best to simply learn not to drop it. See **Photo 1**.

Photography by Zoe Wood









5: DMM Mantis makes an ideal belay device for trad climbing with a single rope and covers a range of diameters. ▲

6: Belaying with double ropes takes a little practise. In order to feed them independently you'll need to split the ropes between your fingers. ▼

7: A solid and dynamic standing stance. ►



## Be safe

The advantage of climbing indoors first is the belaying hours you'll have notched. Appreciating what it feels like to hold falls and lower your partner is valuable and can be easily adapted to the crag. However, it's also worth remembering that a number of climbing accidents can be attributed to belaying errors, or poor belaying – namely failing to hold a fall safely.

The wide choice of belay devices and ropes available makes it ever harder to ensure an optimum pairing. If you're not sure what the resultant friction will feel like set up a little test before you climb, or at the very least run the rope back and forth through the device. If it glides along silky smooth then pay particular attention to your handgrip on the rope. Remember also that some of the devices you may have used indoors, or sport climbing that have 'assisted locking', like the Petzl Grigri or the Climbing Technology Click-up, are not appropriate for trad climbing.

A good all-round manual device suitable for trad climbing works with one or two ropes and is effective with a range of rope diameters. Those with the additional friction of grooved channels to assist the braking function are a good choice. **Photos 5 and 6** show the DMM Mantis with single and double rope. In addition to understanding how the device works and, equally as important, is adopting an optimal belay position. A rock-steady dynamic stance with one foot forward and space to step forward or back is harder to achieve on rough ground, so position yourself carefully, see **Photo 7**. Don't forget that stepping back too far from the base of the crag for a better view will create an outward/upward pull on the first runner, meaning it is more likely to lift out should the leader fall. When the ground is boulder-strewn or very uneven it may be better to sit down, and although this compromises dynamic and reactive belaying as well as your view, it could well be better than stumbling backwards and pulling your partner off. Ensure the braking arm is clear to pull backwards, as in **Photo 8**.





## Be attached?

The decision whether to be attached at the base of the crag is dependent on a number of factors. Run through this checklist and if none of them apply you'll be better off remaining free to move around a little. Directly above the sea or on a ledge above steep ground – you'll need an anchor that will prevent you being pulled off downwards should your leader fall off without any runners in (or if the runners rip). This will be a regular belay designed to resist a load from below it.

If the base of the crag doesn't have a drop below it you probably won't need a regular anchor, but you may consider a ground anchor (one to limit you being pulled up into the air) if the leader is heavier, or you are expecting to hold numerous big falls. Threads, trees or tree roots, upward pulling nuts or, better, cams all work in this case. Attach yourself with the rope, to keep it dynamic, and allow a little slack so you can adjust position for a better view or dodge a falling rock (**Photo 9**).

8: Sitting is a better option when the ground is very rough, but ensure your braking arm is clear to move freely.



Wherever possible  
carry only what  
you really can't  
manage safely  
or comfortably  
without

9: Attaching to a ground anchor is a good idea if the leader is heavier than the belayer.

## Be attentive (and a little psychic)

The best advice for minimising belay errors is to be attentive. Momentary lapses in concentration, fiddling with your phone or grabbing a drink, leave you vulnerable to being caught off-guard. A loose grip on the brake rope at the same moment the leader falls can be disastrous. Once momentum is gained, and the rope starts running, it is VERY difficult to regain control without severe rope burn. Belay gloves can be a valuable addition to the kit list for just this reason, but more importantly always watch and anticipate. Adopt a belay style tinged with paranoia.

Finally, once your leader is out of sight, you'll have to feed the rope intuitively. Pay attention to feeling movement in the rope. A smooth pace with brief pauses for runners to go in is standard. Jerky rapid pulling for slack may indicate the leader is finding the climbing challenging and, therefore, clipping at high speed. This should put you on standby. Likewise, long pauses, or ups and downs – the rope going in and out, normally indicates a crux move ahead – assume you're on high alert now. And remember, you are on duty until you are sure you've heard your leader shout 'safe'. If in doubt, keep your leader on belay until all the rope has been taken in. Better safe than sorry. ■

**Libby Peter** has been climbing for over 25 years, she is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and International Mountain Guide and is author of *Rock Climbing – Essential Skills and Techniques* published by MTUK. She also produced *Get Out On Rock – the definitive instructional DVD*, you can see a taster of this at [libbypeterclimbing.co.uk](http://libbypeterclimbing.co.uk). Libby is delighted to be supported by DMM and Rab.







## Starting out Boots

Climbing is becoming more and more popular and, dare I say it, almost mainstream. Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson hit the big time as the story of their *Dawn Wall* ascent went global. For a while they were the Number 1 story in the US and over here, on the other side of the pond.



It was everywhere, all the channels carried the news and even yours truly was dragged into the BBC for live TV and radio interviews and on the same evening some primetime Sky News action. At the BBC I was told that we were broadcasting to a staggering 43 million people. Whether this has had an influence on the numbers joining the sport who knows, but it's out there, in people's minds and on the tips of their tongues. So why me? Well apart from the fact everyone else was busy I was there just to be an expert witness really and help get across what these guys were doing. Long gone are the big aid climbing stories of the past it is all about free climbing in Yosemite now and Tommy has been leading the charge for years.

Tommy Caldwell didn't just step into the upper echelons of the world's elite climbers, he worked his way up from the bottom, starting out as a kid with climbing mentors, climbers that were far better than him. I first remember bumping into him on the World Circuit while he was competing. Like many climbers from the past he came up through the ranks guided by a group of well-travelled and motivated climbers. Today with the numbers in climbing it is almost impossible to happen upon a mentor for everyone, let alone a really good one. Today, it is all about the coach. Every wall has them, we now have qualifications for them. As with everything some are good and some are bad. Some of the best don't do the qualifications and some of the worst do. If you are thinking of getting a coach or some coaching ask around, ask for advice, ask the pros don't always go for the man with the ticket. I am working towards mine at the moment and took the advice to learn from the best.

The catch phrase of the *Dawn Wall* spectacle was: "They are climbing this wall using only their hands and their feet." Sounds a little silly to some climbers but that's about all climbing really is. The relationship between standing on your feet and stopping yourself falling off backwards by holding on with your hands. Feet are the real deal, they are everything, they are the drivers of our upward progression, the steeper it gets the more important they become, learning to use them properly at the outset is critical. Funnily enough they are also attached to the strongest parts of our bodies, our legs. They never really get tired. Sadly, indoors, it is very hard on large blobs or resin to help teach good technique, the outdoors is much better for this. Smaller more complex and delicate footholds teach us to use much more precision.

### Climbing Boots

If you are going to go climbing buy some boots. Don't rely on hire shoes after more than a session or two, a well-fitted boot will help you develop precision footwork which, in turn, will increase your confidence to trust your feet. Floppy boots make sloppy feet. When choosing boots DO NOT be brand led or price led. Go to a shop that stocks lots of brands and let them lead the way and fit you the right boots.

Feet come in all shapes and sizes. Some of the best footwear stockists are actually some of the smaller more climber orientated stores around. Two examples of many are Crag X in Sheffield and Rock On in London. Both stores carry a large selection of boots, many brands, and

Lots of models to try out at a Scarpa boot demo.  
Photo: Evie Cotrulia

Different boots, styles, shapes and ways to fasten them.



have the staff that really know what they are talking about. Staff that can and will take the time to guide you through lots of shoes to get the ones that work for you and not the ones that your mate likes.

Time and time again I come across beginners or clients that buy into the wrong fit because of the name or just because they are the most expensive boots. 'News Flash' better kit does not automatically make you a better climber. Knowing how you use it does. Also getting a random shoe just because they were cheap or second hand doesn't necessarily make them any good, just cheap. A quality fit is the way to go. A really good way to also help you choose boots is to keep an eye out for boot tests or 'demos' as they are known. All the big brands run them and you will get a chance to try out and climb in lots of different styles, you can get advice from the guys that work with the boots, climb in them and understand their design and areas of use.





## Boot Demos

Most people should be looking for a shoe that ticks all the boxes and will do everything well. Diving headlong into an extremely downturned, technical and top end Formula 1 kind of shoe will get you nowhere apart from probably pain and being unable to stand on many footholds. A downturned shoe as a first pair is definitely a no-no. These higher end shoes are designed as the second, or even third, pair for your bag. Use them when the angle gets really steep and you need to really pull on the toes to keep your body into the steep angle or when the footholds are very poor but sharp. Some footholds need a softer shoe to smear all over them, Fontainebleau is a classic example of this, with large bowl-shaped smeary footholds that a soft shoe will easily flex and mould to. At the same time Fontainebleau might also need a stiff shoe. Many problems can be on quite sharp and small edges. A shoe with stiffness will get some real power and support through the edge. Obviously no boot can do both of these things to the max but a shoe can do both quite well. One way to find the best fit and best boot for you is to keep an eye out for boot demos or boot tests. All the big brands run them and you will get a chance to try out and climb in lots of different styles, from entry level through to the top end. One of the best demos around are the Rock On demos held each year in London at Mile End and in Birmingham at Redpoint. Dominic from Rock On invites plenty of companies to go along. Last year Boreal, La Sportiva, Red Chilli and Scarpa all attended with around 30 different styles to try out and actually climb in. Try before you buy at its best.

The length and relationship between toes can decide the toe shape required. A thin foot might mean that you need a shoe where you can easily reduce the internal volume, a lace-up works well to remove any bagginess down the length of the foot. A high arch might mean a more technical and shaped boot is a natural step.

## Parts of the shoe

The front end or toe of the shoe is really where the majority of the magic occurs, only when we become more advanced do we need to understand the rear. In our normal everyday activities our toes are really important, they provide all the control and balance and are the last push forward when walking or running. Having said that it doesn't take too long to discover the benefit of being able to

heel hook or rest with the heels. Many boulder centres will try and incorporate a multitude of techniques into even their most easy circuits and boulders to try and educate new climbers, whether you see it or not is a different issue.



1: Heel. 2: Inside edge. 3: Outside edge. 4: Toe.

## Inside Edge

The inside edge is the most commonly used part of the foot, especially for beginners, on slabs or a vertical wall. Here a front-on, chest-to-the-wall style is easily adopted, although it is not necessarily the best. This is where both feet are using the inside edges at the same time as it is the most comfortable part of the foot to use when facing the wall.



◀ The inside edge is the side of the boot when you are standing on the big toe.

## Outside Edge

The outside edge is best used in combination with the inside. One foot is inside edge and one foot is outside edge. This has the result of turning the body sideways, this in turn brings the centre of gravity closer to the wall taking weight off the arms and onto the feet. Sometimes though it is the shape of the foothold that can make you choose which part of the shoe you use. Think of fitting the shoe to the hold like you would fit a round block into a round hole, the square block doesn't really fit. The most common body positioning in climbing utilises both the inside and outside edge at the same time. This brings the centre of gravity over the feet, closer to the wall and increases reach. ▶

The outside edge is the side of the boot around the little toe. ▼







## Toe

The toe is the real work horse of the climber's foot. This can make a short person tall or a tall person small. Dropping or raising the heel changes both these things. Pointing the toes and being able to stand tall and make that elusive big reach possible. Obviously if you still can't reach you might need to dyno. The more point that you have to the shoe allows you to stand on small footholds although with a reduction in comfort. In a left shoe the more the toe point is to the right the more power you will get through the big toe. It is a double-edged sword here though as the further this toe is over the better the shoe is on the point and on the inside edge but the worse it will be on the outside edge. These more aggressive toes also work better with slightly harder rubber if used on small holds and the force on a very small amount of rubber is increased and rubber deformation becomes more possible.

Quite quickly a climber will realise that there is another part to the shoe that can be really useful. The heel can be that magical tool that can help unlock a whole new world of heel hooks. Learning to use the heel to its full potential is an art in itself. To put it simply, if the force put on to the heel comes directly out of the back of the foot through the heel and into the wall or hold it will not slip. It is only when the force moves away from the solid surface that you will get heel creep and the heel will pop off.

## Soft or stiff

As I mentioned earlier the softer shoes are better at moulding on smears, the stiffer are better at edging. Shoes come in all different stiffnesses and how they perform can also depend on a couple of other points such as weight of the climber and size of the foot. A shoe in a UK 3 will be much stiffer than in a UK 11 and a climber weighing 12 stones will flex a shoe easier than a climber weighing eight stones. A heavier climber with big feet might need a very stiff shoe to really use the edges without the shoe and foot collapsing. ■

The heel low will allow more sole contact with the rock, maybe when smearing. ►



The heel level with the toe allows you to get a great edge, whether inside, outside or toe. ▼



The heel high will allow you to put more force through a small foothold, a little like a ballerina, and increase your reach. ►



▲ A soft shoe is very flexible and requires a strong foot.

A stiff shoe is great for putting real force through small footholds. ▼



▲ A toe with a slight down turn, not so aggressive.

▼ An aggressive toe is great for small footholds on steep ground but pretty much useless for the majority of climbers.





## THIS MONTH'S GUEST PRO CLIMBER IS **DOMINIC SUTCLIFFE**, WHO UNDERGOES THE Q&A WITH GAZ

### How long have you been selling shoes?

I started working in a large outdoor shop in the late 80s, quickly gravitating towards the climbing department as there were so few climbers in the store. This was to change my life as I opened the first Rock On shop a few years later (1993) and have been selling literally thousands of climbing shoes ever since.

### How many shoes do you think you have sold?

I'd guess I've sold over 30,000 pairs of shoes to climbers of all shapes and sizes with feet of all shapes and sizes. We started with a range of only half a dozen rockshoes (or rockboots as most were then) but this quickly grew as we realised there was such a variety of foot shapes.

### How many styles do you stock?

We now stock somewhere between 45 and 50 models in as big a size range as we can at any time to be able to cater for the range of foot shapes/sizes, climbing styles, climbing abilities, needs and aspirations.

### Is this to try and cover all bases and foot shapes?

It all starts with the climbers' feet; what shape, broad or narrow and where they may be broad? What about length of toes compared to each other and to their foot, how bendy those toes are, how much volume the foot has and even how heavy the climber may be compared to their level of experience or compared to how long their feet or limbs are – heavier climbers with long feet or limbs may need more supportive shoes? Rock shoes are not (or shouldn't be) fashion accessories, they are tools to do a job which is to help their wearer climb well, so all these considerations come into which shoes will be best. If they also look cool so much the better.

### Do you have a go-to beginners shoe that works for a large majority of feet?

Everyone's first shoe is really important. If they (or we) get this wrong it will affect their climbing forever. Badly fitting shoes may permanently put them off climbing. Shoes DON'T have to be painful, but they DO need to tight. This is a fine line to tread as one person's pain maybe another's perfect fit so there isn't a 'one shoe fits all' solution. One general rule is that a more supportive shoe may not need to be quite so tight. Another is that a lace-up shoe will offer more adjustment than a Velcro when new and more fine tuning as the shoe stretches a little and conforms to the particular foot it is on – which it almost certainly will.

### Velcro fastenings have become more and more popular over the years but lace-ups are still going strong, what are the benefits of both styles?

At Rock On we view Velcro (and other similar) systems as an easy way to get a shoe OFF in a hurry rather than a lazy way of putting them on, thus allowing them to be worn a little TOO tight for 'comfort' to allow a bit of extra performance. There are all sorts of variables apart from the closure system. How stiff or soft, how asymmetric the front is, how downturned, the shape of heel, how much tension there is in the rubber, how close the rubber gets to the ankle bone or how high it gets toward the Achilles, leather or synthetic, lined or not, to consider but a few? After all the feet I've seen I can often 'guess' which shoes will fit best but it's not my choice, it's the climber who has their feet in them and so they, with my help, can work out what they will be happy with. And sometimes wide feet will squeeze together into a narrow shoe in an unexpectedly comfortable way. Some of the time the best fit isn't the expected brand, colour, style or especially size.



To put that last in perspective I'm in anything from a UK size 6 to a 8 ½ in some of the shoes that fit me and there are differences in size even within a single brand's range. Finally, whilst there are undoubtedly small differences between different shoe rubbers a good fitting shoe with the 'worst' rubber will probably work better than badly fitting shoes with the 'best' rubber for most of us, whatever best means. So exploit boot demos and if you can find a shop with lots of possibilities and staff who will encourage you to get your feet into a variety of shoes get there and buy your next shoes. You may be surprised how much difference it will make. ■

Rock On are a group of shops but stock a great range of climbing shoes with knowledgeable staff.

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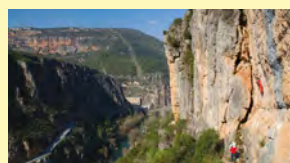
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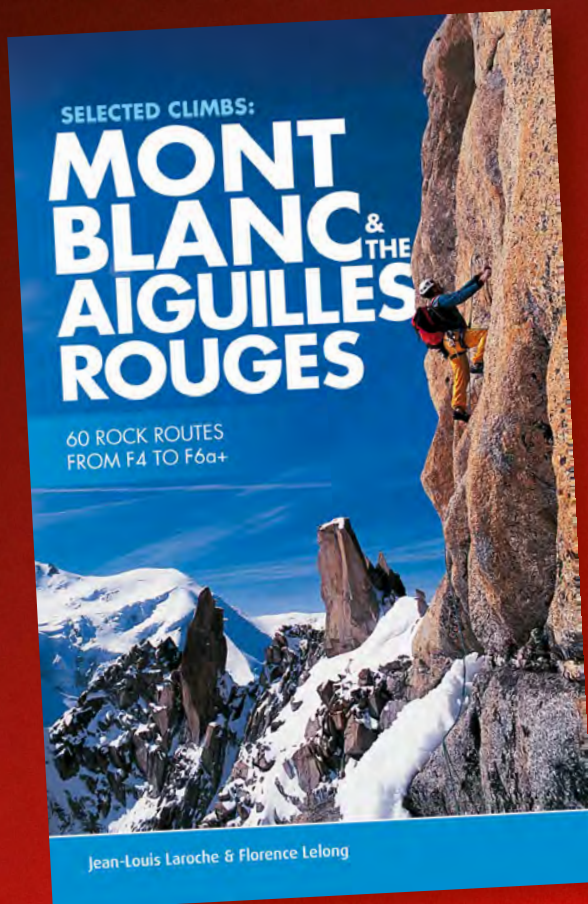
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# Materials Witness

what's new and upcoming in outdoor materials

As human evolution continues at its microscopically slow pace, it will be a while until outdoor clothing and equipment need a fundamental redesign. Therefore, all the research and development and time and effort go into developing new fabrics, materials, treatments and construction techniques.

Whilst many developments and launches are simply branding exercises involving existing technology, there are more than enough genuine progressions that are worth mentioning. In this article, I'm looking at recent and future developments in waterproof fabrics, insulation and surface treatments and looking at some of the best products that showcase these new materials and concepts.

As with many areas of technological advance, it's actually pretty important that fabrics and materials are continually developed. New and improved

materials will be, almost by definition, expensive. This is because there will be significant development costs to recoup and also because it is likely that they will be specialist and, therefore, of niche interest. If they're niche, then they won't sell as many, so the unit price needs to be higher. What this does tend to mean though, is that last year's 'latest technology' filters down to less specialist products at lower prices and everybody benefits from better gear at affordable prices.

Equally, and more cynically, new developments

Wiz Fineron on *Silbergeier* (F8b+), Beat Kammerlander's 1993 classic multi-pitch route on the Kirchlispitze, Rätikon, Switzerland.

Photo: Calum Muskett for Rab

and improvements (however small) are necessary in a consumer society, to persuade us to part with our cash. Thankfully, outdoor gear doesn't follow the example of consumer electronics with perfectly good products becoming rapidly obsolete. Also, most outdoor enthusiasts seem to me to be relatively conservative and don't get overly excited by the 'next big thing'. This means that the designers and technologists in outdoor products have a longer term frame of mind and generally only bring developments to market that are genuine improvements.





## WATERPROOF FABRICS

Firstly, a quick reminder of the current state of play with waterproof fabrics; without a doubt, Gore-Tex is still the most widely used high performance waterproof and vapour permeable fabric on the market. Of course, Gore-Tex is not simply one fabric. There are currently three types of Gore-Tex, with a new fourth one to come next winter. All Gore-Tex is based around an ePTFE membrane. This is expanded polytetrafluoroethylene sheet, in which there are micro pores that allow water vapour out but don't allow water molecules in. So far, so good, but to prevent contamination from bodily oils and salts, which would cause the membrane to leak, Gore-Tex also has PU (polyurethane) as part of its construction. This gives greater durability but makes it impermeable to air. Practically, this means you are more likely to overheat when working hard.



The Patagonia Refugitive jacket which uses Gore-Tex C-knit.



Arc'teryx Zeta AR jacket



The Rab Latok jacket which is made using eVent.



An example of hydrophobic down is the Rab Microlight Alpine.

As I mentioned above, Gore-Tex comes in three flavours. The first is simply called Gore-Tex (confusing) and comes in many types of constructions (two layers, two and a half layers and three layers). Standard Gore-Tex is aimed at the general outdoor user and can have lower prices than the other categories. Gore-Tex Active fabrics are both lighter and more breathable, as it has a much thinner construction than the other types and is aimed at the more active (sweatier) user, who will appreciate the extra vapour permeability. Gore-Tex Pro is currently the top of the tree for mountaineers and climbers, as it is more breathable than standard Gore-Tex but much more durable than Active products.

The new family addition for winter 2015 is Gore-Tex C-knit. As with Pro fabrics, it will come in a three-layer construction, but the inner backer layer is knitted from extremely fine yarns and then fixed (in a secret way, of course) to the Gore membrane.

## looking at recent and future developments in waterproof fabrics, insulation and surface treatments

This makes C-knit fabrics, slightly lighter, much softer and more flexible than Pro fabrics. The suggestion is that they will also be slightly more breathable than Pro but slightly less than Active. From the C-knit jackets I've seen so far for next winter, the comfort and quietness of the fabric is what is being emphasised. They also come in at lower prices than Pro garments, mainly due to the face fabrics on Pro garments being more abrasion resistant and expensive. In a triumph of marketing over reality, they seem to be presenting C-knit as a 'game changer' – it isn't, but it is a lot more comfortable than any other Gore shell fabric, so it will be worth considering when they arrive in the shops in Autumn. Some good examples will be the **Patagonia Refugitive Jacket** (£360) and the **Arc'teryx Zeta AR** and **Zeta LT**.

Whilst Gore-Tex is virtually ubiquitous it is, of course, not the only performance waterproof and breathable fabric. eVent is also a micro porous ePTFE membrane but it achieves its greater air permeability, and hence greater water vapour permeability, but not using PU in its construction. Instead, the pores are lined with a hydrophobic (water-hating) and oleophobic (oil-hating) chemical which prevent contamination. Whilst not using PU has improved the breathable performance, it does seem to have some effect on the long term durability of the waterproofness but it does allow excess heat to pass through the membrane, so it works well for those who run hot. Good examples are the **Rab Latok** (£240) and the **Montane Alpine Endurance** (£325). ►



Another relatively new fabric that you may have seen around is Polartec Neoshell. This is not an ePTFE membrane but is actually an electrospun PU membrane (bear with me...). The PU is dissolved in a solvent and then 'fired' from a very small tip. This superfine stream is fired at a collecting plate and it builds up into a very fine film. The potential for this technique is pretty amazing, as there are so many variables that can be changed and, hence, membranes with very specific properties could be made. As with eVent, the air permeability is higher than Gore-Tex so it's good at losing excess heat and moisture vapour. Polartec are very up-front about the fact that the hydrostatic head of Neoshell will decline with wear and washing. However, they say that it will not fall below 5000mm, which is still definitely waterproof. Good examples are the **Montane Further Faster Neo** (£250) and the **Rab Nexus** (£280). In many ways, waterproof fabrics are a branding game. You will have far more choice in Gore-Tex clothing than in eVent or Neoshell, as brands understand that customers trust what they know, and Gore-Tex is the most well-known because it is the oldest.



The North Face Fuseform Originator jacket using the Fuseform technology.

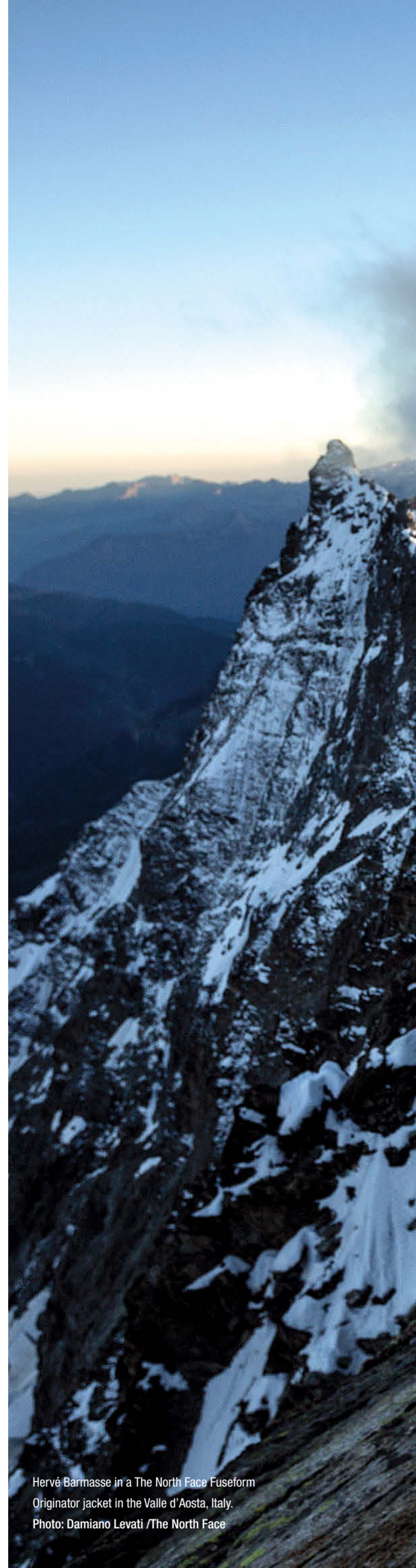


The Montane Further Faster Neo jacket, made with Polartec Neoshell.

You may also have noticed that some brands strike out on their own and have their own fabrics. Mountain Hardwear use a fabric they call Dry.Q which comes in four different levels of performance. Berghaus are also launching a collection of fabrics under the Hydroshell banner this spring.

None of these fabrics are major technological breakthroughs and are based on the technology outlined above, but it allows the brands the freedom of being able to use the constructions and face fabrics that they want. Gore-Tex have a high degree of control over what face fabrics and features manufacturers can utilize on their garments which, it could be argued, stifles innovation.

A great example of this is **The North Face's Fuseform** technology. This is a fascinating area of development, as it may potentially change both the way that the fabrics are made and the way that garments are constructed. There are two elements to Fuseform. Firstly, it allows two different materials to be woven together to make the face fabric. **The Fuseform Originator** (£260) has Cordura yarn in specific areas as an example. This means that you can add extra abrasion resistance to specific areas of the garment without having to sew them in. The face fabric changes seamlessly (literally), significantly reducing the number of seams and the associated taping. Secondly, the garment is cut from a single piece of fabric and then sewn together. This again reduces the number of seams, which makes the garment lighter with fewer potential failure points. All Fuseform pieces use The North Face's own HyVent fabrics in different constructions, as much as anything else, to allow them the freedom to try different things. ▶



Hervé Barmasse in a The North Face Fuseform Originator jacket in the Valle d'Aosta, Italy.  
Photo: Damiano Levati /The North Face







Another new development is in footwear waterproofing. Gore-Tex are launching Surround this spring. Whilst there is no change in the membrane used, the construction is a bit different. At the moment, Gore-Tex lined footwear doesn't breathe downwards from your sole. The idea of Surround is that the water vapour will pass downwards through a breathable insole and the Gore-Tex membrane into an open matrix underneath and then sideways to reach the outer fabric of the footwear. This means that those lower side areas of the boot can't be covered in leather or rubber. Whilst I understand the concept, the designs I have seen can, by definition, leave those areas of the boot vulnerable to damage and wear. What you do get in many cases though, is extremely light footwear. I feel that the concept is more suited to dryer and less muddy environments where sweaty soles are more of a problem than feet getting wet from external moisture. Some good examples are the **Mammut Comfort High GTX** (£170) and the **Meindl X-SO 70** (£160).

The Mammut Comfort High GTX boots which uses Surround waterproofing.



Before I leave waterproof fabrics, there is one other area of change that's been occurring under the radar. The area of water repellent coatings.

This has become an extremely complicated and potentially controversial area and one related to environmental damage and human health. The water repellent treatment that is 'pre-installed' on your new waterproof shell is almost certainly made using perfluorinated compounds (PFCs). There has been concern about these for a while, with two in particular being part of compounds used in outdoor fabrics; PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) and PFOS (perfluorooctanesulfonic acid). These are known as C8, as they consist of a chain of eight Carbon atoms. It is now widely recognised that these PFCs persist indefinitely in the environment and also accumulate in biological organisms (us). These accumulations are associated with a variety of health issues including cancer. The big issue seems to be what happens when a fluorocarbon water-repellent breaks down over time, as it will do. When it is manufactured, the C8 PFC is held safely in a large molecule. As it biodegrades or oxidizes, PFOA can be released.

There has been a long term switch away from PFOA and C8 chemistry over the last decade and Gore-Tex announced in January 2014 that they had eliminated all PFOA from both their DWR treatments and also from the manufacture of their ePTFE membrane. Grangers also ceased using C8 chemistry in 2007. There has been a general move to water repellent treatments based on C6 (six Carbon atoms) and sometimes C4 chemistry. It is believed that as C6-based products degrade, the resulting chemicals are less dangerous and potentially less

bio-accumulative but this is an ongoing area of research.

Fascinating as this all is (?), what is the practical outcome? C6-based DWR treatments are not as good as C8-based ones and need re-applying more often and potentially in large quantities.

This is important because an effective DWR is vital in making your waterproof comfortable and effective. Nikwax have never used PFCs and their proofing is based on an EVA and wax elastomer. Whilst this has minimal environmental impact, some find it less effective than PFC based treatments. Interestingly, Grangers, who do make treatments containing C6 PFCs, also make a range of products that doesn't, which implies that some outdoor users are interested in and aware of this topic. More change in this area will occur as there is increasing pressure to stop using PFCs altogether. Indeed some brands such as Haglöfs are clearly stating that, where they think they can technically, they are using non CFC DWR treatments.

Finally, and related to the previous topic, is Bluesign. Some of you may have noticed this logo cropping up on websites and on clothing swing tags. Bluesign is an organisation that promotes sustainable textile production. It looks at all elements of the process to eliminate all harmful substances from the production of a garment and it ensures that the production of the garment is as environmentally friendly as possible. Related to the C8 topic above, C8 has only been, finally, banned from Bluesign approved fabrics and processes on January 1st this year, although their approved list includes many shorter chain PFCs and 25 fluorine free alternatives. I think Bluesign approval will become increasingly essential. This is partly because outdoor gear manufacturers will realise that this is the right thing to do, partly from government pressure and also from outdoor consumers becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues and expecting to see that their purchases have the right environmental credentials.

## INSULATION

The area of insulation has probably seen more technological changes than any other in the last few years. I'll start with the biggest change, which is that of water repellent down. This has seemed like the Holy Grail until recently. Unless you are allergic to it, everyone loves down as it is very efficient, and feels great to wear. It is also useless when wet and it can get wet very quickly. By making the down clusters themselves, water repellent, you can potentially have a near perfect material that hardly absorbs moisture and dries quickly. As an example of how much better water repellent down is, Nikwax are saying that their latest Hydro-phobic down performs 15 times better than untreated down, in terms of water absorption. In the official down shake test, where down and water are shaken together in a one litre container, untreated down lasts 22 minutes until it is completely saturated, whereas the latest Nikwax down lasts 150 minutes. You can clearly see that this is a huge improvement and brings down back into contention as a material to use in most mountain conditions. There are a few manufacturers of hydrophobic down. Rab use Nikwax Hydrophobic down and for next winter Montane and The North Face will be using Allied HyperDRY. I certainly get the impression that these hydro-phobic technologies are developing quickly and further performance improvements will be seen.

The Mammut Comfort High GTX in use.







Black Diamond Hot Forge Hybrid Hooded



The Patagonia Nano Air Hood uses their own FullRange Insulation.



Polartec Alpha is used in the Marmot Isotherm hood.

## This means that the designers and technologists in outdoor products have a longer term frame of mind and generally only bring developments to market that are genuine improvements

Also, you have the choice between down treatments that use CFCs and those that don't. As an alternative to hydrophobic down, Primaloft produce their Gold Insulation down blend. This is 70% hydrophobic down and 30% Primaloft Gold. The inclusion of synthetic fibres further increases the moisture resistance and reduces drying times. Good examples of this are the **Black Diamond Hot Forge Hooded** (£200) and the **Montane Black Ice 2.0** (£190), which is new for next winter.

Another area of improvement has been in that of making 100% synthetic fills feel more 'down like'. The North Face has its own Thermoball material, which is, as the name implies, a synthetic fill in clusters rather than layers as usual. The **Thermoball Hooded Jacket** (£170) is a really nice, compressible yet warm piece. For next winter, Primaloft are launching their Gold Luxe fill, which they say looks and feels like down. In the UK, Montane have an exclusive with this in their new **Hi-Q Luxe Jacket** (£170).

Frankly, almost without exception, all modern synthetic fills work well, whether they are, for example, Primaloft, or Arc'teryx's Coreloft or Haglöf's QuadFusion. The only area in which they don't work as well is when they are used as midlayers or in situations where you are working hard. This is because these materials aren't that good at allowing the passage of moisture vapour. Therefore, they tend to get a bit sweaty and you overheat. Polartec Alpha is aimed at addressing

this issue and has created a sub-category of its own – movement insulation. Alpha is, in effect, a thin layer of lofted fibres sandwiched between protective woven layers. This means it can be used in stable sheets without having to be sewn to the garment inner and outer fabrics. It is highly air permeable so excess heat and moisture passes easily outwards. Some good examples of this are the **Rab Strata Hood** (£160), the **Marmot Isotherm Hood** (£180) and the **Mammut Foraker Hybrid Light** (£150). **Patagonia** also have their **Nano Air** collection which fills this niche but with a greater level of insulation and stretch and uses their own FullRange insulation. I've worn the **Nano Air Hood** (£200) for a few weeks and it's exceptionally comfortable whilst maintaining a really stable temperature.

The Marmot and Mammut pieces mentioned above are great examples of another trend that is very apparent – that of the hybridisation of materials in single garments. One of the earliest pieces I saw this on was **The North Face Verto Micro Hood** (£190). This has a body insulated with their water repellent Pro Down and the arms and shoulders made from ripstop nylon and a stretch softshell fabric. There are a number of other excellent examples of this concept including the **Mountain Equipment Kinesis** (£170), which combines Polartec Alpha with a lined windproof hood and arms and the **Montane Alpha Guide** (£140) which combines an Alpha body with stretch fleece arms and hood.



Mountain Equipment's Kinesis jacket is an example of hybrid garments.

The concept of all these hybrid styles is to keep relatively light insulation in the core area and have less bulk and more freedom of movement in the arms, which require less insulation. It's an obvious idea but one that is best suited to those moving quickly, due to the lower levels of overall insulation. Also, these pieces can fill the niches of being both lightly insulated outer wear and a highly efficient and low bulk midlayer. It's worth remembering though that if worn as an outer layer, they are generally not as tough as a beefy softshell.

Hopefully in this article, I've managed to show that many of the fabric, material and construction developments in outdoor gear are not just marketing and 'change for change's sake'. I think that the technologies I've discussed are not simply launched to persuade you to buy something, but are steps forward. Anyway, if you're not tempted to buy them now, just wait a few years, they'll become the norm and everyone will be wearing them. ■



# Statement:

## Ben Moon's climbing career captured on film

by Henry Jepson

Last month saw the release of Ben Moon's long-awaited biography, *Statement*. Written by award-winning author and journalist Ed Douglas, a series of in-depth interviews, diary extracts and magazine articles give an insight into the life of a revolutionary rock-climber. Throughout the 90s the majority of Ben's outstanding climbing achievements took place within the discipline of bouldering and *Statement* outlines how many of these ascents were caught on camera as part of many classic bouldering films shot during the era. Fortunately all of these titles are now available on SteepEdge, so this week I looked back at my favourites, to watch a legend climbing in his prime.

### One Summer

Ben Moon and Ben Pritchard's old-school bouldering video captures a productive summer in the Peak District. Beginning with a circuit at Stanage Plantation, which features ascents of *Deliverance* and *Ben's Extension*, the film soon moves its attention to the polished limestone training grounds of Stoney Middleton and Crag X. While these small, esoteric crags are by no stretch of the imagination world-class climbing destinations, they are home to some seriously hard climbing, due to several of the world's best climbers living in the area and climbing there multiple times every week, pushing each other into putting up some of the world's most difficult problems. Despite appearances from other strong local climbers including Jerry Moffatt and Ben Pritchard, it's Ben Moon who steals the show, making the first ascent of *The Pinch II* (8B) at Stoney, repeating Jerry's problem *Superman* (8B) and potentially becoming the first person in the world to campus one-five-nine at the old School Room. The film also ends with the only footage of Ben climbing on *Hubble*, at the time the hardest climb in the world and widely regarded as the first F9a route ever climbed. A must-see for any keen boulderer, *One Summer* captures a snapshot of a time when the Peak District truly was the epicentre of world bouldering.

### The Real Thing

Made a couple of years after *One Summer*, *The Real Thing* was the first real bouldering 'movie', using stylish filmmaking techniques and acting as more than just a documentation of hard climbs in the Peak District. Described by Douglas in *Statement* as 'fast-paced and slick, driven on by its techno soundtrack,' the film follows Ben and Jerry to Fontainebleau, where they aim to make the first repeats of Fred Nicole's test piece *Karma*. Considering that the film contains about a quarter of the amount of climbing footage shown in *One Summer* and the majority of the film is made up of racing cars, snowball fights and 'partying in Paris', I was surprised by how downright enjoyable *The Real Thing* was to watch. Admittedly it looks incredibly dated, with sweeping shots of 90s Sheffield and Ben, sporting peroxide blonde spiky hair, working topless in a steel foundry for reasons which remain unexplained, but this only adds to its charm. It's further helped by Jerry's inability to stop mugging to camera and one hilarious shot where he drifts his car through both Stanage and Burbage North car parks. In terms of Ben's climbing he ends up being the only member of the group who climbs *Karma* and makes it look so easy that he then proceeds to climb it again, and again, and again. A ridiculous yet near perfect climbing film.



### Winter Sessions

A decade later, Ben Moon was still probably the strongest boulderer in the Peak and with *Winter Sessions* being a documentation of Peak District gritstone bouldering in the winters of 2005 and 2006, it captures Ben making the first ascent of one of the most coveted lines in the country, *Voyager* (8B) at Burbage North. However, what perhaps is more interesting is footage of a then-15-year-old Tyler Landman making the second ascent just months later. Ben, who was approaching the end of his professional climbing career, was sponsoring and mentoring Tyler at this time, a leading figure in a new breed of climbers who had grown up with climbing walls and sponsorship and by following Tyler as he makes short work of the hardest problems on grit, *Winter Sessions* shows the arrival of this new generation of climbers. With one hour and 45 minutes of constant bouldering, the film doesn't hold back on climbing action, documenting various first ascents alongside repeats of some of the area's hardest problems, including Ben and Jerry climbing some of the best esoteric problems in the Burbage Valley to a brilliant jungle soundtrack. Ace.

Download any of these films from [SteepEdge.com](http://SteepEdge.com) and **Save 20%** with the code **STEEPCLIMBER**

*Statement: The Ben Moon Story* is available to purchase from [v-publishing.com](http://v-publishing.com) now!

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# climber

**NEXT MONTH**  
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## RELISH THE RED ROCKS

Mike Hutton gives the low down on one of America's top venues – Red Rocks outside the bright lights of Las Vegas.

## LAKE DISTRICT ROCK

With a superb new FRCC selected guide imminent, Pete Sterling reflects on the guide and highlights what everyone should be planning for their trip to Lakeland this summer.

## CLASSIC SWISS ALPINE ROUTES

Bruce Goodlad describes two routes in Switzerland's Bernina and Bregaglia area: the Piz Roseg by the classic mixed Eselsgrat and superb granite on the Piz Balzet and Spazacaldera.

## MIKE ADAMS INTERVIEW

In a rare interview, dark horse of British climbing Mike Adams, who recently completed a new Font 8c in Yorkshire, talks to good friend Tony Simpson.

## ROCK SHOE REVIEW

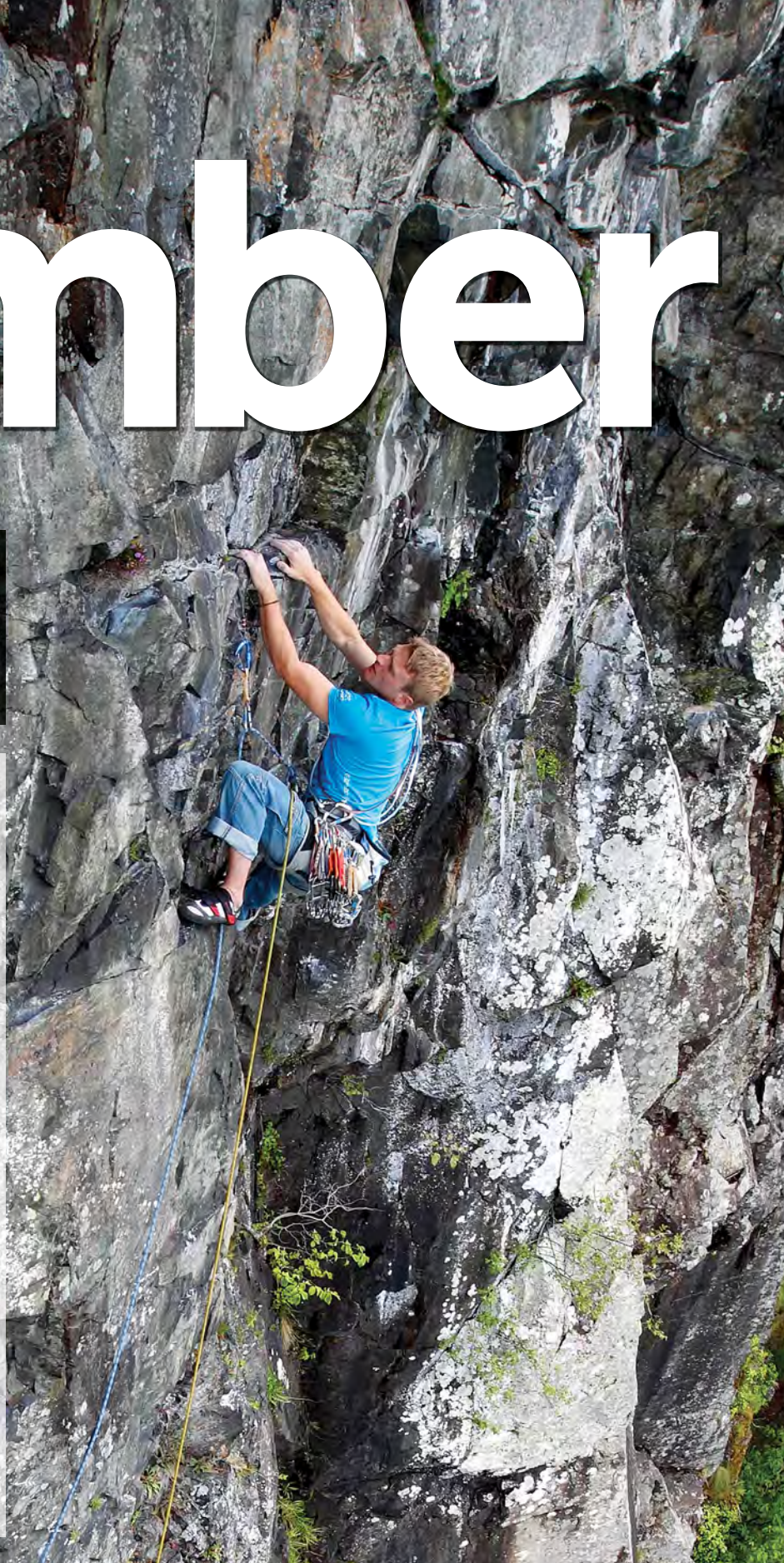
Keith Sharples scrutinises new rock shoes for 2015 and plus a few late arrivals in 2014.

## NEW – ASCENT OF MAN

In a new monthly feature Mark Reeves looks at climbing across the globe through the ages.

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# GUIDING LIGHT

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